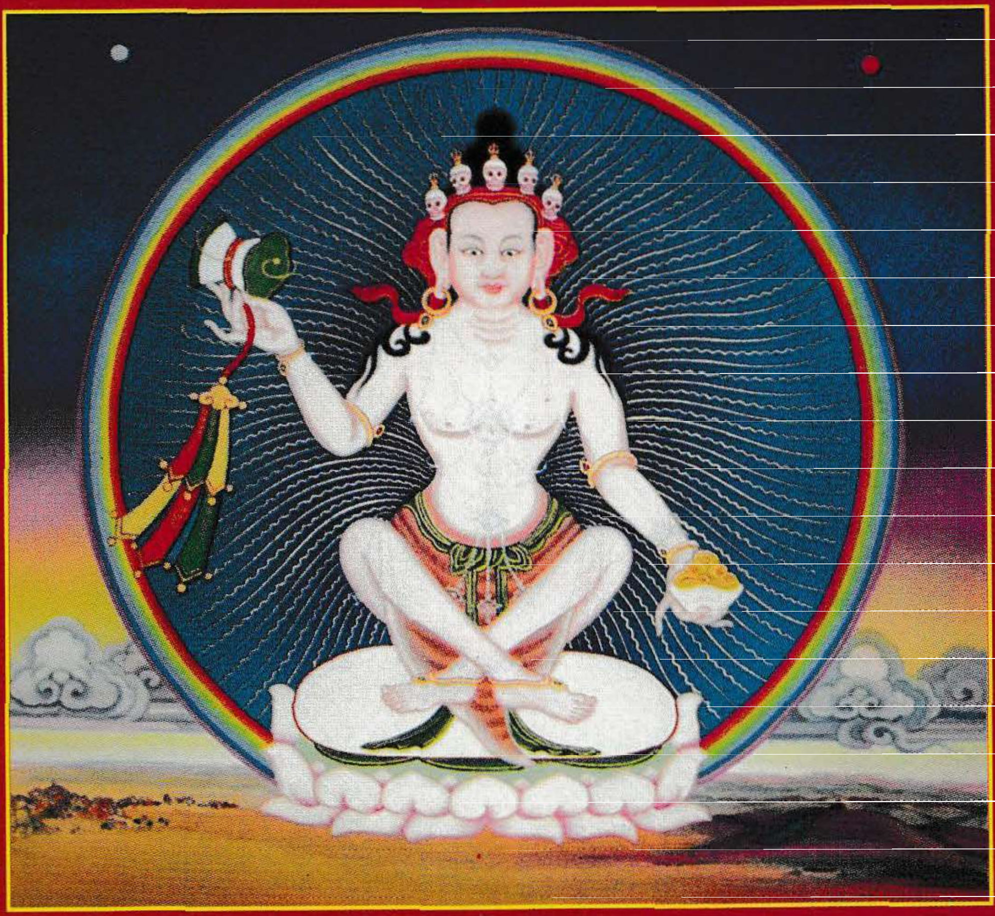
Lama of the Gobi

The Life and Times of Danzan Rabjaa Mongolia's Greatest Mystical Poet



by Michael Kohn

"An evocative and attractively-written account of an important Mongolian historical figure, Michael Kohn's 'The Lama of the Gobi' will challenge many accepted ideas about Mongolian religion and society."

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Professor of Asian Anthropology
University of Cambridge

"A highly readable and intriguing introduction to the fascinating life and times of Danzan Rabjaa, Mongolia's wildly unconventional poet-mystic, packed with legends and anecdotes... Should find a place on the bookshelf of world spirituality between Milarepa and Rumi."

Christopher Atwood
Assistant Professor of Mongolian Studies
Indiana University

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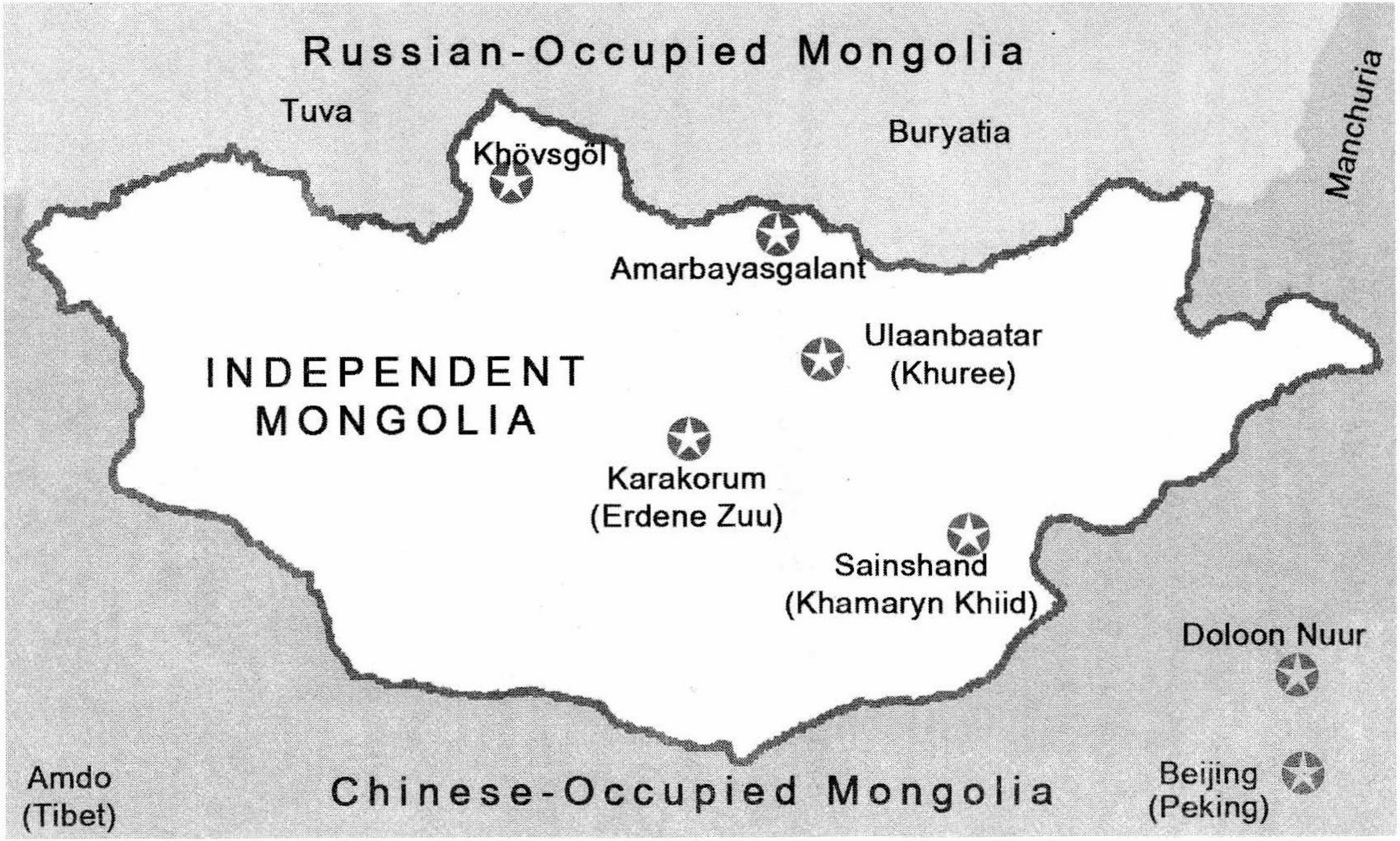
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Publisher's Note

Anyone visiting Mongolia soon hears tales of Danzan Rabjaa, the fifth reincarnate lama of the Gobi, who was officially known as the Noyon Khutagt. The role of this reincarnate lineage in the Gobi was somewhat akin to the role of the Dalai Lamas in Tibet, in that they both to some extent symbolized and were responsible for the spiritual and the social integrity of their respective realms.

The Fifth Noyon, popularly known simply as Rabjaa, was perhaps the greatest genius of the Noyon line, writing hundreds of mystical poems and dozens of philosophical treatises, plays and operas. He was also the most controversial, becoming famous for his many love affairs and his unconstrained consumption of alcohol, both of which are prohibited for Buddhist monks. Mongols love him for both.

When the Soviet-backed Communists took over Mongolia in the early 1920s they at first began a campaign of character assassination of him. Later, however, following the China-Soviet conflict of the 1960s, the Communists began to drag him out of the closet, projecting him as anti-Chinese, anti-Old-School, and all the other "anti" labels popular with Communists of the time. His stature has only grown with the passing years.

Michael Kohn is neither an historian nor a Buddhist scholar, but rather is a wonderful investigative journalist. He brings his skills in this arena to the task, not with the aim of presenting a hard history of Rabjaa himself, but rather to reveal the manner in which the myths and legends surrounding Rabjaa play in the minds of Mongols today.

Michael's portrait is honest, celebratory and downright fun. He originally showed me the manuscript for advice on finding an appropriate American publisher. I happily gave him this, but suggested that in the meantime we should release a limited edition in Mongolia for the many young Mongols who love to read in English, as well as the small stream of foreigners who visit the country.

We at Maitri Books have greatly enjoyed working on the project. We hope that you will equally enjoy the read.

Glenn H Mullin, Editor-in-Chief
Maitri Books, Ulaanbaatar

Author's Preface

My research for this book was divided into four parts. The first part consisted of my visits to Khamaryn Khiid and other places associated with Danzan Rabjaa's life; the second consisted of interviews conducted with experts and scholars; the third consisted of Rabjaa's own writings (autobiography, poems, and theatrical performances); and the fourth consisted of the various items published about 19th century Mongolia, its art and culture, the Gobi desert, and of course Danzan Rabjaa and his contemporaries. Much of the credit for the compilation of Danzan Rabjaa's biography goes to the Mongolian researchers Ts. Damdinsuren, D. Tsagaan and the German researcher Walther Heissig.

So far as the orthography is concerned, I have tried to use the most common and simple transliteration for Mongolian words and names. Many of these words, however, now transliterated in the Cyrillic script, sounded differently in the 19th century when Mongols still used their traditional script. Place names have changed over the years, and I have chosen to include the name used when the reference was compiled. For example, I call Ulaanbaatar "Khuree" when describing the city before the 1920s. In many cases I simply used what sounded most appropriate.

The majority of quotations used are taken from books of the period written by travelers including the Abbé Huc, Aleksei Pozdneyev and Nikolai Przewalski, and are sourced accordingly. However, the quotes attributed to Danzan Rabjaa (taken from Mongolian history books, or from oral storytelling), should be considered as mere guesses as to what he might have said.

It should be noted here that much of what has been recorded about Danzan Rabjaa is fictional or contradictory. There were no real journalistic accounts or records of what he was like and scant information about the activities of his monasteries. Much of the research herein was pieced together from the most reliable and reasonable sources. I note where stories and historical evidence conflict and I include discrepancies in the text or endnotes.

My main purpose in writing this book has been to introduce Danzan

Rabjaa to a Western audience. The book describes the major achievements of his life: where he traveled, the people with whom he associated, his accomplishments, goals and aspirations, and the legends that Gobi people still tell about him.

This work started out as a two page pamphlet that was intended for distribution at the Danzanravjaa Museum in Sainshand. However, the more I looked into his life the more interested I became. Eventually the pamphlet developed into a book.

Several people have helped me to create this book, most notably, the trustee of the Danzanravjaa Museum in Sainshand, Z. Altangerel, his co-worker D. Bold, and all the lamas of Khamaryn Khiid.

Great thanks are also owed to translators B. Batbayar and Ts. Munkhhuyag at the Montsame News Agency in Ulaanbaatar. Ts. Tsendsuren (Tsegi) from the University of the Humanities put in a tremendous amount of work in translating legends, stories and interviews. I deeply appreciate her enthusiasm on the subject. My wife Baigalmaa worked tirelessly to see the project through to the end, kept up all my contacts when I was away, and made a trip with me to Sainshand, Danzan Rabjaa's homeland. This book would have been impossible if not for the hard work of these people.

Baljiryn Dogmid wrote the story in *The Mongol Messenger* that introduced me to Danzan Rabjaa. The staff *The Mongol Messenger* and the Montsame News Agency supported my earlier research while Brigitte Cummings helped with material written in German. Thanks to those who made comments on the early drafts: Chris Kaplonski, Thubten Gyatso and Jane Kos. Magda Szpindler and Baast Batbold assisted with the later drafts, and helped with the translation of the poetry. Tungaa at the Central Library in Ulaanbaatar gave me access to important books and texts. Special thanks to Simon Wikham-Smith and Konchog Norbu who read and made comments on the final drafts.

I am grateful to Mr. Rinchen Dharlo of the Tibet Fund in NY, who supported and encouraged this project, and Glenn Mullin of Maitri Books in Mongolia, for carrying the manuscript into book form.

Thanks also to friends and family in California, and to my parents for their support in this endeavor.

Most of all, thanks to Danzan Rabjaa, an enigmatic character whose spirit, I am sure, is still alive.

Michael Kohn
Ulaanbaatar, May 2006

Introduction

The year is 1938, and the place Dornogobi Province, Mongolia.

On a sultry summer night, a young lama sets out on a dangerous but important mission. Knowing that he has precious little time, the lama begins the arduous task of removing all the sacred objects from his monastery, with plans to bury them in the desert. It seems like an impossible mission, for one man to secretly move and bury 150 wood crates, and yet he must try. For if he does nothing, the precious collections of art, accumulated for over 100 years, will be doomed to destruction.

Khamaryn Khiid is but one of many monasteries slated for destruction. All across Mongolia in this awful year, hundreds of temples have been burned down and thousands of monks arrested or shot. Khamaryn Khiid could be next. A division of soldiers is already posted at the monastery, awaiting further orders.

Knowing full well the severity of the situation the lama, who is now known to history as Lama Tuduv, hurries to the sacred White Temple, a special building that housed the monastery's most important artifacts and icons. In the gloom he can make out piles of Buddhist manuscripts and sutras, masks and costumes used in sacred rituals, theater props used in plays, artwork delicately sculpted and painted by master craftsmen, and valuable objects brought from foreign lands. In the center of this are the mummified remains of Danzan Rabjaa, the master poet, artist and saint who had founded Khamaryn Khiid some 120 years earlier.

Fortunately for Lama Tuduv, most of the items are already packed into wooden crates; the categorizing, packing and recording of items having already been prepared for just such an emergency evacuation.

With the utmost care and silence he opens one of the crates and inspects it, studying the items inside. The significance of each piece had been made known to him by his father Ongoi, who had instructed Tuduv from birth on the history of Danzan Rabjaa and Khamaryn Khiid. Tuduv's ancestors, dating back four generations to his great-great grandfather Balchinchoijoo, had always assumed responsibility for the relics left behind by Danzan Rabjaa. The family legacy weighs heavily upon Lama Tuduv's shoulders as he ponders the days ahead. The soldiers will soon make their move to destroy the monastery. There is no time to lose.

Lama Tuduv silently carries the wooden crate out of the temple and begins the laborious process of hauling it into the desert. The long march goes on for over an hour until he reaches a ravine cut into the landscape. Sunk out of sight from the enormous plains around him, the ravine will offer some protection from anyone who might later search for the boxes. He struggles for another hour to dig a hole in the earth, and chants a mantra asking forgiveness for digging into the sacred ground.

Dripping with sweat, the young lama digs until the hole is big enough for the box. Then, very carefully, the box is placed in the hole and covered with dirt and rocks.

Resting for a moment in the light of the moon, Lama Tuduv nods off to sleep. Dreams rush to him and in his troubled mind he sees the young soldiers setting temples alight; the whitewashed walls char to black as the elegant concave roof collapses. The soldiers then turn their guns on the rows of red-robed monks. Plumes of smoke rise in the air as the monks fall face-first into a mass grave. Tuduv winces in the dark as the blood is shed and the precious legacy of Danzan Rabjaa – Mongolia's greatest poet and lyricist – is defiled in a matter of minutes.

Startled awake by the nightmare, Tuduv rises to his feet and sees that he is still alone. He chants softly to himself, praying that his visions will end, yet he knows the destruction is inevitable. He returns to Khamaryn Khiid in silence, arriving just before the dawn.

Each night thereafter he repeats the process of filling up crates and hauling them to the desert. What he buries is recorded only in his mind. No trace is left.

Two months pass in this way, but then in the middle of the summer the situation changes for the worse. Trucks carrying more soldiers arrive with orders to take over the monastery. When the monks protest they are arrested and taken away.

Lama Tuduv watches from afar as the buildings are set alight and his fellow lamas are trucked off. Later he watches angrily as the soldiers pick through the smoldering remains, scavenging for valuables.

Turning his back on the destroyed monastery he rides into the Gobi, heading south towards a *ger* (yurt) where his sister lives. Here he will stay to wait out the storm of death and destruction.

Now skip ahead to 1991.

A cloud of dust billows up from the yellow earth as three men dig their heels into shovels and turn over dirt. One looks up for a moment to survey the land. A great monastery once stood just east of where the men dig. Khamaryn Khiid was a monastery of whitewashed walls and ornately painted wooden eaves, home to young students and learned scholars, a monastery with cavernous temples from which the sounds of conch shell trumpets once blew. Now there is nothing but dry barren desert and stray camels; nothing remains of its glorious past.

Four feet below the surface, one of the men strikes something hard with his shovel. Sand and rocks are brushed away and a wooden box is revealed. The men run their fingers over the warped wood, perhaps to absorb some of its secrets. Altangerel had been correct; with no map he had found one of the boxes buried by his grandfather Tuduv, who had died only a few months before. The men congratulate each other, and then lift the heavy crate out of the ground and into a battered Russian jeep. Rolling over the low hills they return home in silence.

Altangerel, trained as the next curator for Danzan Rabjaa by his grandfather, opens the crate carefully as a crowd of on-lookers loom overhead. Daylight floods into the box for the first time in many years. He reaches a large hand inside and extracts a porcelain. The intricate design and colorful details are a wonder for these people of the Gobi. Having lived under the veil of Communism for so many years, this generation knew little of their past. But this box is proof that something amazing had occurred here many years ago.

Altangerel too is fascinated, although he has seen these objects before. Years earlier, his grandfather Lama Tuduv had dug up this very box and showed him its contents. Tuduv had described each item in detail so that when the time was right, Altangerel would be able to properly recount the legacy of Danzan Rabjaa. That time, it seems, has finally arrived.

Based on the lifelong lessons given by his grandfather, Altangerel returns to the desert and the secret places where the boxes had been buried. Altangerel digs up nearly half of the sixty-four crates. The boxes are cared for and treated with wonder, as though an ancient past had been reincarnated into a living, breathing element. Indeed, it has. The legend of Danzan Rabjaa, once just a series of myths passed around by lonely nomads of the Gobi Desert, has at last been revealed as truth.

These boxes, where they came from and why, is told in this story.

Chapter One:
The Mysterious Monk

Is there wine? Then drink!
Is there a song? Then sing!
Are there thoughts? Then talk!
Is there brandy? Then drink!

Danzan Rabjaa

The Gobi Desert has long been one of the most inhospitable places on Earth. Dreaded by early Western explorers, it was infamous for being able to kill a man in any number of ways. Dust storms blew away camps; bandits were a constant threat; the summer heat baked the skin; the winter cold froze a person to the bone. Abbé Huc, a French missionary who traveled through Inner Mongolia in 1842 wrote in his book *Travels in Tartary, Thibet and China:*

> "In Tartary, there are no towns, no edifices, no arts, no industry, no cultivation, no forests; everywhere it is prairie, sometimes interrupted by immense lakes, by majestic rivers, by rugged and imposing mountains; sometimes spreading out into vast limitless plains. There in these verdant solitudes, the bounds of which seem lost in the remote horizon, you might imagine yourself gently rocking on the calm waves of some broad ocean."[1]

This does not seem the sort of place one would expect to find a drama theater or a genius. One would certainly not expect to find here a Renaissance figure capable of producing sophisticated artwork and lyrically brilliant poetry. And it seems unlikely that one might find in 19th century Mongolia a respected education center located in a remote corner of the Manchu Empire. It is surprising then, that such a person and such a place did exist.

The genius I speak of is Danzan Rabjaa, the Fifth Dogshin Noyon Khutagt, or Incarnate Lama, of the Gobi Desert, and one of the most complex and misunderstood personalities in the history of Mongolia. He has been called a drunken womanizer, a madman, an uncompromising tyrant, and a heretic. But he has also been called a genius, a reincarnate lama, a social critic, a man of compassion, and a champion of human rights. He may have been all of these.

Danzan Rabjaa was known by a number of names and titles. His official Buddhist title was Ikh Gobi Dogshin Noyon Khutagt, or the "Fierce Lord, Incarnate of the Great Gobi." Much of his life was spent as a wandering cleric, where he visited monasteries across Inner and Outer Mongolia, and trained students in the principles and practices of Vajrayana Buddhism. Yet Rabjaa had many other interests, including poetry, drama, music, science, herbal medicine, and painting.

When not traveling, he spent much of his time in monastic institutes and meditation hermitages in Alasha, Doloon Nuur and Chahar, as well as in his own specially built facilities in two different regions of Outer Mongolia. His main monastery was Khamaryn Khiid in the eastern Gobi Desert (modern Dornogobi). The religious services he hosted were usually accompanied by games, festivals and feasting. His skills as an artist, writer, philosopher and pedagogue were so well-known that students of Buddhism from Japan, China, Tibet and Korea spent time studying at his monastery. The leaders and princes of these countries also paid him tribute with gifts and honorific titles.

Among his talents, Rabjaa is best known for his powerfully emotive poetry and plays. Until very recently his writings had been forgotten by modern Mongols. It is only in the past decade that his works (dozens of songs and more than 300 poems) have been re-discovered. He now is considered, quite simply, Mongolia's greatest writer and playwright. His operatic-drama *Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo* (*Saran Khökhöö Namtar* in Mongolian) was the first modern theater production in Mongolia, and surely a unique event in the Gobi Desert. To perform his masterpiece, he built Mongolia's first playhouse, a colossal three-story complex at Khamaryn Khiid.

The opera was so popular that he took it on the road. Like a twelfth century European troubadour, Rabjaa traveled between monasteries with his performers, packing his costumes into chests and placing them on the backs of sturdy two-humped camels. *The Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo*, performed regularly until the 1920s, is still one of the best-known plays in Mongolia, and is studied by academics and artists alike.

Rabjaa's life, interests and achievements very much reflect those ascribed to the unconventional Sixth Dalai Lama. He was also recognized as a medicine man and tantric practitioner. Utilizing a combination of natural herbs and prayers to heal the sick, he treated countless Mongols, mainly common nomads, during his travels. He was also trusted to care for nobles and even the Mongolia's spiritual leader, the Bogd Gegeen of Khuree.

Legend speaks of his enthusiasm for cleanliness. He had his own bathing ger, which was equipped with a large round tub where he washed himself and invited friends to scrub off the desert dust. Afterwards his guests were served his finest *arkhi* (distilled alcohol, often made from fermented milk) and dabbed with imported perfumes. This must have been a remarkable experience for those dusty Gobi dwellers.

Rabjaa's bathing ger, not to mention his temples and libraries, were by no means kept exclusive. People of all social standing, rank and gender were invited to join him in his activities and events. He mixed with the locals: ate, drank, prayed and bathed with them. Despite his fine silk clothing and crimson monk's robes, he stood on equal footing with the Gobi nomads. Such a man was certainly rare in nineteenth century Mongolia.

Why then did this wealthy, powerful and talented man reach out to the poorest members of society?

The answer perhaps lies in his childhood. Rabjaa was a child of the Gobi, born onto its sands and under its blistering sun. There is something about the raw power of this massive and forbidding desert that makes men equal, a trait Rabjaa carried with him to the grave. Having lived his youth as a poor beggar, he was emotionally close not merely to his disciples but also ordinary Gobi dwellers. Although elevated to a more prominent status at a young age, he still carried with him the sorrow and misery that he experienced during the first six years of his life. These hardships are often reflected in his poetry and plays.

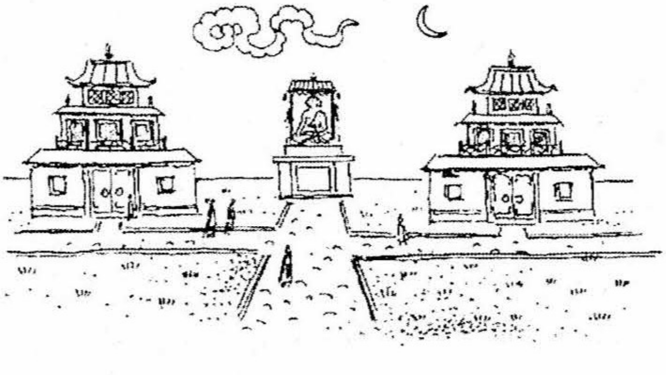
Rabjaa's adulthood was somehow an extension of this difficult and unstructured childhood. He was by no means a prim and proper lama, abiding by the strict tenets of a Buddhist monk. Celibacy and abstention from alcohol, for example, were by no means a part of his life.

His religious beliefs, however, seemed consistent with traditional Mongolian teachings. He was not (contrary to popular belief) merely a follower of the Red Tradition (Nyingma), but rather combined both the Red and Yellow (Gelukpa) faiths. This was common practice for Buddhism in Mongolia, which from the time of the great Zanabazar (1634-1723) was built on the lineages of the Fifth Dalai Lama and the First Panchen Lama, both of whom combined the Gelugpa and Nyingma traditions in their personal lives.

Once when asked whether or not he was Nyingma or Gelugpa, Rabjaa replied "Buddha's right arm is the Red School and his left is the Yellow School. Would you like me to tear Buddha in half?" He used this metaphor because Padmasambhava, the founder of the Nyingma tradition, is seen as an incarnation of Avalokiteshvara, the buddha of compassion, a quality associated with the right side of the body, whereas Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa tradition, is seen as an incarnation of Manjushri, the buddha of wisdom, a quality associated with the left part of the body.

Rabjaa's faith in the Gelugpa is further described in the following verse:

> Between vessel and essence,
> The essence is the great one.
> Among the four great continents,
> Jambudvipa is the great one.
> Of all forms of life, a fully qualified
> Precious human rebirth is the great one.
> Of all lineages from Buddha Shakyamuni,
> The Yellow School Lineage is the great one.
> And of the Jewels of Refuge,
> Refuge in the lama is supreme.[2]



Danzan Rabjaa's Khamaryn Khiid Monastery complex in Dornogobi, with a Buddha statue sandwiched between a Red School Temple to his right (the viewer's left), and a Yellow School Temple to his left.

Despite his self-proclaimed alliegance to the Yellow tradition, he did not always enjoy warm relations with all the mainstream Gelugpa leaders, especially those in Khuree, because of conflicting social and political beliefs. He was by all accounts a man not afraid to question authority or criticize people of low ethical standards.

His lifestyle was another matter of contention. Sex and alcohol were his favored preoccupations, and he often made note of this in many of his poems, closing with a line such as "the drunken one wrote this."

His exploits earned him nicknames from capital city residents, such as "the crazy one" and "the wild drunk of the Gobi." His hot-headed personality only added to this reputation. Legend tells of his launching into fits of uncontrollable fury at the most banal of incidents. Danzan Rabjaa knew himself all too well when he wrote:

> My strong and true mind
> Is out of kilter with the world
> My ill-tempered nature
> Is out of kilter with local customs.

His temperamental personality resulted in a somewhat lonely existence. Unable to deal with others in these times of private madness, he occasionally retreated to desert caves for days on end. He even owned a ger with no door; his disciples knew not to disturb him once he had slipped under the wall. This must have been extremely unique amongst a people known for their great hospitality, social customs and family ties.

Yet Rabjaa was unlike other Mongols. Mentally and spiritually higher than his peers, a gap was always in evidence. These unique circumstances earned him the moniker "*Dogshin,*" which directly translates as "terrible," or possibly in Danzan Rabjaa's case, "wrathful," which not only displays a sense of power, but also respect.[3]

Danzan Rabjaa's complex personality became a seed for myths and legends. As with many folk heroes, the stories about his deeds have been highly exaggerated or simply created. Indeed, much of his entire life seems like a fairy tale, contrived by creative nomads with plenty of time on their hands. Aleksei Pozdneyev, who traveled in Mongolia in the late 19th century, made careful note of this after visiting a number of Mongol *khuvilgans* (reincarnate lamas). Pozdneyev wrote,

> There is almost no possibility of getting a true notion of the life of a khuvilgan from the stories of Mongols themselves.

> Filled with reverence for their holy persons, they besprinkle their entire life with unprecedented miracles, from the moment of conception until death itself. [4]

As we will see later, many of the myths surrounding Rabjaa are connected with his travels, his miraculous deeds, and his affairs with women. Some of the stories are long drawn-out biblical-type adventures. Others are little factoids that Gobi people like to bring up in conversation. I was once told, for example, why no recognizable photograph of Rabjaa exists. Apparently, various foreign travelers tried to snap his picture, but the image of him always came out as a featureless dark figure, as if he were a ghost or had the power to sabotage a camera by using mental telepathy.[5]

There are hundreds of other tall tales related to Rabjaa. Although most were collected after the 1960s, more than 100 years after Rabjaa's death, the stories can be beneficial to the historian if compared with what few factual accounts have been revealed about his life. Not only do similar patterns occur, but they also lend insight into 19th century Mongol life and provide necessary clues as to how common people viewed this monk. The wild and erratic stories earned Rabjaa a special place in Mongolian history as a social commentator, an independent thinker, and as a rebel.

His folk hero status is strongest in his native Dornogobi Aimag, home of his famed Khamaryn Khiid Monastery. Today, the playhouse in the provincial capital Sainshand is called 'Saran Khökhöö Theater' and the curtains inside are embellished with two large embroidered scorpions, the creature Rabjaa respected most and used on his own personal seal. There is also a museum dedicated to Rabjaa and his possessions. It has become a sort of pilgrimage site for scholars of Mongol literature.

More recently Rabjaa has become an important figure of study for researchers, writers and artists. He is, however, virtually unknown outside the Mongol world. I lived in Mongolia for almost two years before learning of him whilst working for a newspaper called *The Mongol Messenger,* which ran a story about him in October 1999. I was instantly intrigued and wanted to learn more about this mysterious character. This book is the result of my findings.

◆

Rabjaa was the fifth incarnation of the Gobi Noyon Khutagt incarnate lamas. Two more would eventually follow for a total of seven incarnations. These 'Gobi Saints' are all allegedly the product of another line of incarnates that originated in Tibet and India. Each incarnate is an emanation of a single Buddhist tantric mandala deity called Yansang Yidam, who is associated with wizardry, power, genius and healing. This mandala deity is also known as Damdin, which is Hayagriva in Sanskrit.

Traditional biographical literature on the Noyon incarnates documents a large number of lives prior to the appearance of the First Noyon in Mongolia. The Danzanravjaa Museum in Sainshand has paintings of approximately thirty of them, some of whom are believed to have lived more than a thousand years ago. A few of these preincarnations are well known historical figures, including the Fourth Karmapa Lama, who is listed as the twenty-second incarnation. Another well-known figure is Kukuripa, one of the eighty-four mahasiddhas of India. It is most likely that the line of incarnates was assembled following the death of the First Noyon Khutagt.

The richness of this line of incarnations is an indication of how deeply rooted Danzan Rabjaa must have considered his place in the Buddhist realm. On display at the Danzanravjaa Museum is a set of paintings which shows off many of these past incarnations. Each framed painting displays one incarnation in meditation or yogic pose.

A brief look at the paintings shows that the artist used several figures in Buddhist lore as his models. The painting of the first incarnation, for example, is modeled after Amithaba. The sixth incarnation Zanaadaraa, bears a striking resemblance to Milarepa.

Each incarnation is painted in a pose that signifies special abilities gained as a by-product of meditational thought. The third incarnation, for example, is shown as a master bookkeeper and author of sacred scriptures. The eleventh is shown in front of a cave, representing the forty years he spent in isolation. The twentieth could travel long distances in an instant. For a complete listing of these incarnations, see the appendix of this book.

The thirty-second incarnation of Yansang Yidam, named Sanjaibalsan, was said to have had a Mongolian student under his tutelage. One day, during a lesson, the eager disciple begged his teacher to be reborn in Mongolia in his next life. As the student was his favorite, Sanjaibalsan agreed to the proposal. Thus, after the Tibetan master died, his students sought the next incarnation in Mongolia.

And if locating one khuvilgan in Mongolia would be a significant event, finding three would be even more auspicious. According to instructions given to students of Sanjaibalsan, three children were found in Mongolia, each embodying an aspect of the previous incarnation. One child, found in modern day Bulgan Aimag, was named Khangalchingellin Adoochin Khutagt, or "The Wild Cowboy Saint." A second, found in modern-day Övörkhangai Aimag, was called Nomj Mergen, "Wise and Educated." The last was found in modern day Dornogobi. He was called Dogshin Sogtuu Khutagt, "The Fierce and Drunk Saint," but is better known by the name Agvangonchig.

It was said that later in life the cowboy saint loved horses, the wise saint was fond of books, and the drunken saint had the power to change vodka into medicine. It was this last incarnation who was recognized as the First Gobi Noyon Khutagt (1621-1703).

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Agvangonchig was born into an aristocratic family as a descendent of Batmönkh Dayan Khaan, the boy-king who ruled Mongolia from 1470-1504. Agvangonchig's father was Sonam Daichinkhun Taij, a resident of Mandlai Sum in present day Ömnögov Province. Following recognition, the boy was sent to Lhasa for ordination and training, where he remained for more than thirty years. Thereafter he returned to his homeland and built Amgalan Temple[6] in 1666. This was the first Buddhist monastery in Gobi Mergen Van Khoshuu. It later grew into Tsorai Monastery, the home of the Gobi Mergen Van.[7]

Following the death of the First Noyon Khutagt, his reincarnation was discovered in a Gobi area called Tulagt, about 10 kilometers south of present day Sainshand. The son of an ordinary livestock breeder named Sundur, he became Jamyn Dambi Jantsen, the Second Noyon Khutagt (1704-1739). It is believed that he built the ill-fated Choilong Monastery at Tulagt. This monastery, located at the foot of Bayan Zurkh Uul (Rich Heart Mountain), was reduced to cinders soon after its construction, when an oil lamp tipped over and torched the buildings.[8] The temples were rebuilt twice, each time leveled by fierce sand storms. By the end of the 18th century the monastery was completely abandoned.

He died at the young age of 35 and his body was interred at Agvangonchig's Amgalan Temple. Years later, in 1833, Danzan Rabjaa moved his remains to a small sanctuary near the ruins of Choilong Monastery.

More is known about the Third Noyon Khutagt, Jamyn Danzan (approximate life dates 1740-1765), although the Russian and the Mongolian accounts utterly contradict one another.

The Russian writer Pozdneyev claims that this lama took to hunting in his younger years, and that over time his hunting party evolved into a notorious band of brigands. Pozdneyev states that the young lama's deeds became so infamous that he became known as "Dogshin" or "The Terrible." Pozdneyev concludes his account by claiming that at the age of twenty-five Jamyn Danzan was arrested by the Manchu authorities for stealing a government cache of silver headed for Tsetsen Khaan Province. He was taken to Peking, where he was tried, found guilty and executed. As had been done with other incarnate lamas who had stirred up trouble, the Manchu court prohibited the search for a new incarnate.[9]

This account is completely unknown to Mongolians, who paint an utterly different picture, presenting him as a well-respected and praiseworthy monk, and as a highly talented writer, builder and meditation teacher. They know him best for his construction of a temple at Tengeriin Takhiilgat Uul ("Sacrifice to Heaven Mountain") in Dornogobi Province. According to popular legend, when the Third Noyon Khutagt meditated on this mountain the deity Khaand appeared riding atop a dragon and bestowed special meditative powers upon him.

Although Mongolian versions of Jamyn Danzan's life story are full of praise, the stories of his father are less flattering. He was a nobleman called Tseden Mergen Zasag who had borrowed money from a Tangut trader, had used it for public works projects, but had failed to repay the loan.

There is a legend about what happened next. According to the story, the Tangut man died soon after, but even in the afterlife he never forgot about losing his money to Tseden Mergen Zasag, and complained to Erlig (the King of the Underworld). Shortly thereafter, Tseden Mergen himself died and was brought before Erlig, where he found the Tangut man waiting with crossed arms and pursed lips. An argument erupted over the money and Tseden denied that he was in debt to the Tangut. Seeking to resolve the dispute in a just manner, Erlig called Tseden's son, the Third Noyon Khutagt, to act as a witness. His spirit was brought to the underworld from his place of meditation in the Gobi and Erlig questioned him over the incident.

Honest as he was, Jamyn Danzan confirmed that his father had not returned the money. This response pleased Erlig, and the Tseden Mergen Zasag was punished.

For his honesty, the spirit of Jamyn Danzan was allowed to return to Earth. However, when the spirit came upon his body he found that it had already been pickled and mummified by the lamas of Choilong Khiid! Unable to re-enter his dead body, his spirit took up residence in the nearby Bayan Zurkh Uul, where it still lives today.

Another account states that the mummified body of Jamyn Danzan was originally interred at Choilong Monastery. However, after the temple was destroyed by fire the remains were scattered on Bayan Zurkh Uul.

The mountain has since become an important place of pilgrimage. It is here that one can make requests to the spirit of the Third Noyon Khutagt. Oddly, in the mid-1800s, a new law instituted by Manchu authorities stated that all requests made on Bayan Zurkh Uul had to be declared out loud. A clerk was on hand to record the requests, to ensure that no negative statements were being said about the Emperor or the Manchu Empire.[10] Censorship in the 19th century Manchu Empire, it would seem, stretched literally to the most distant mountain tops.

In 1990, a resident of Sainshand, a certain Gombo, constructed a small temple on Bayan Zurkh Uul and called it Sharliin Süm (Corpse Temple). Visitors still come here to make requests. These no longer have to be made out loud.

If one believes Pozdneyev's account, it should be duly noted that the followers of Jamyn Danzan did not heed the warning of the Manchu Emperor. The Gobi dwellers had it in mind that a fourth incarnation would indeed be located and the legacy would not end. Disciples of the Third Khutagt secretly continued their search for the next incarnation, and eventually found what they considered to be the correct child in Selenge Province. The year was 1769.

The young incarnation, named Jamyn Oidov Jampts, grew up to become a distinguished and famed lama. But, like his predecessor, he also came to an early end, an incident to be discussed later.

Danzan Rabjaa was the incarnation which followed Jamyn Oidov Jampts, after which two more Noyon Khutagts were found. The last one, the Seventh, died in 1931.

Chapter Two:
The Torch is Passed

If we are to believe the Russian accounts of the Third Noyon Khutagt, which ascribe an infamy for wild horseman deeds, then the Fourth was just as well-known for his pious acts. Jamyn Oidov Jampts was born in 1765 and dedicated his life to promoting Buddhism in Mongolia. He also was widely known as a healer, and dispensed medicines as he wandered between monasteries. Many of his disciples made pilgrimages to Zuun Khashant Monastery, which he established in modern-day Zuunbayan sum.

This greatness, however, would be overshadowed by one reckless and tragic moment that sealed his fate. The facts of the story have been muddled over time, but according to legend in the year 1800 the famed Erdene Zuu Monastery was struck by a plague of field mice. Locals referred to these tiny, destructive rodents as *shulmuss*, or "female devils." The lamas at Erdene Zuu prayed night and day to rid their temples of these pests, which were chewing away at the wood foundations and causing serious structural damage. Yet none of their prayers seemed to have any effect on the mice, whose numbers were multiplying rapidly.

To halt the disaster, the monks felt they needed a higher authority to appease what they believed was an angry deity. Messages were dispatched to other monasteries requesting the help of skilled lamas. Jamyn Oidov Jampts, never one to turn down a challenge, responded to Erdene Zuu's plea for help.

The Khutagt mounted his horse and began the long journey to Erdene Zuu. Two hundred years ago, relay stations and gers allowed travelers a place to stop and rest during their journey. The stations were primarily set up to serve mail carriers in need of fresh horses, but common travelers were also permitted to use them. For Jamyn Oidov Jampts, the relay stations were also places to sample the local airag, or koumiss, fermented horse's milk.

A feast was held in Jamyn Oidov Jampts' honor upon his arrival at Erdene Zuu and more alcohol - brandy and airag - was consumed. The extermination of the mice began with a special ceremony that included the reading of sutras followed by the lighting of an herbal potion called *'zai,'* which fumigated the temple halls. This technique seemed to work as the mice soon disappeared from sight.

Jamyn Oidov Jampts enjoyed the praise of his peers following the successful round of prayers and more alcohol was drunk in celebration. To amuse himself in his drunkenness, Jamyn wandered around Erdene Zuu, admiring the fine horses of this grassland area.

During his walk, so the story says, Jamyn Oidov Jampts was stopped by a Mongolian taij, a nobleman, who had recently married the daughter of an important Manchurian court official. He had been given the girl as a reward for his loyalty to the emperor.

"Khutagt! You know nothing of Mongolian horses. You are from the Gobi. Why don't you stick to assessing camels?" sneered the taij.

"I am a Mongolian," replied Jamyn Oidov Jampts, insinuating that the taij was merely a traitor for marrying into a Manchu family. "So I know about both horses and camels." The taij protested and soon the quarrel erupted into a fistfight. At some point during this brawl between the lama and the nobleman, with a crowd of on-lookers watching, the Khutagt drew a dagger from his belt and plunged it into the prince. The mortal blow had the taij on the ground in an instant, dying in a pool of blood.

There are actually several versions of this story. The one described here was told to me by Danzanravjaa Museum curator, Z. Altangerel. While there might be debate over details of the incident, there was no doubting the severity of the murder. When news of the incident reached the authorities, Manchu soldiers were dispatched to arrest the 31-year-old Khutagt and bring him to Peking. The monk was under no false illusions about the fate that lay before him, knowing full well the severe penalties for murder.

Escorted by Manchu Imperial guardsmen, Jamyn Oidov Jampts crossed Inner Mongolia with his personal attendant Jigmid Gonchig and headed straight for Peking. Meanwhile, fearing retribution, the disciples of Jamyn Oidov Jampts collected his possessions from Zuun Khashant and sent them to the Bogd Gegeen in Khuree, where they would remain safe.

En route to Peking, the lama composed a song of regret named after a horse called Naran Zul Khul. The lyrics describe in verse the monk's desire to return to the youthful innocence of a foal and to spread virtuous acts.

He writes that in his youth he will read books and pray, in his youth he will sweep away sin and shoot down his enemies. It is a song of hope and a plea for peace.

Sunny Bright Brown:
When she was a foal.
On six important books
I wish to pray.

Healthy and beautiful Brown
She was quiet and young.
White lotus book
I should have prayed.

Brown's mouth is black.
She was a kind foal.
Ten black sins
Sweep away, sweep straight away.

Brown's mouth is white.
She was a kind foal.
Ten white virtuous acts
Spread, spread them straight out.

The big spreading bow
Pointing the sharp arrow;
Spots of the animal like a toxic enemy.
I will hold your body and hunt you from horseback.

Trees looking like a crowd
When branches and leaves are fully grown.
What is so interesting
They are the same.

This song's name is
Sunny Bright Brown.
This song was composed by
The precious Prince Saint.

In the great country
Be safe and quiet .
In the Khan's country
Let's meet together and enjoy all good things.[1]

Jamyn Oidov Jampts told his attendant Jigmid Gonchig that he would not return to Mongolia. When they arrived in Peking Jigmid Gonchig was instructed by his lord to buy a fresh horse from the market.

When Jamyn Oidov Jampts saw the horse he called it Boriv Kheer ("Chestnut") and nicknamed his friend 'Jintu' ("Pillow"), in honor of the comfort he had given him. The Khutagt then leaned towards the horse and whispered his life story into its ear, and explained to Jintu that they would have some connection in his next life through this horse.

Following the departure of Jintu Gonchig, Jamyn Oidov Jampts asked to see one of the emperor's *juntung* (advisor), to whom he gave a silver knife and fire starter, telling him to carry the objects with him on a future journey to Outer Mongolia. He made the juntung promise not to harm the next incarnation should one be found, pleading that the lineage should continue.

The Fourth Noyon Khutagt was executed soon thereafter and a proclamation was made, just as had been done following the death of the Third Noyon Khutagt, ordering that no more Gobi Noyon Khutagts would be permitted. Manchurian policy makers intended to reduce the number of khuvilgans in Outer Mongolia and they saw this murder as a timely opportunity to end this particular line of khutagts once and for all, assuring the public that they were putting an end to a "loathsome and brutal line" of incarnate monks.

Meanwhile, Jintu Gonchig rode the horse Boriv Kheer back across the Gobi and returned to Gobi Mergen Van khoshuu, only to find his monastery in ruins. Manchu troops had burnt Khashant Khiid to the ground and chased away the monks, exacting revenge for the murder of the Mongol prince. The despairing Jintu Gonchig had lost his spiritual leader and his sanctuary, but was not deterred from his mission. Despite the decree laid down by his Manchu minders, he was determined to find the next incarnation in Outer Mongolia. His search would last seven years.

There is a legend about what became of the spirit of the Fourth Noyon Khutagt following his death. According to the tale, the mandala deity Yansang Yidam found the ger of a Gobi princess and revolved around her home for some time, hoping to be reborn from her womb. One night, the princess dreamed that she had given birth to a beautiful baby. Everyone who saw the child found wisdom, intellect and knowledge in his face. The lamas came to the princess and worshipped the woman who gave birth to such a wonderful child. They called her Ekh Dagina, "Dakini Mother."

The following day, the princess described the dream to her family and friends. Day after day the story of her dream grew more haughty, infuriating the spirit that revolved around the top of the ger. Although increasingly disenchanted with the candidate, the spirit did not give up entirely and continued to observe the goings-on.

The princess however, was rapidly attracting bad karma with her haughty behavior and failed to become pregnant. Lamas were brought into her ger to chant prayers for her pregnancy. Yansang Yidam watched all this from the wooden ring at the top of the ger. The inexperienced lamas, however, did more harm than good. Their abhorrent skills and clumsy prayers insulted the spirit. As the ceremony reached its zenith, bells rang out and drums were beaten. A trumpet sounded with an ear-piercing shrill and the horrified spirit collapsed into the ashes of the fire. The disgusted spirit fled to the countryside to search for an honest and clear womb, and the haughty princess failed to become pregnant.

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We can better appreciate the origin of the 'dissatisfied spirit' legend once we learn more about Danzan Rabjaa's biological parents. In contrast to 'Ekh Dagina,' Rabjaa's parents were poor beyond comprehension. They were the poorest of the Gobi poor, unable even to afford a proper ger, instead living in an *ovokhoo* (a tent with no support roof). Their worldly possessions included the clothes on their back and a solitary horse. The father, called Dulduit (of the Dorvod minority), had been a wandering minstrel, and perhaps a trained lama. He had recently been in the East Suunit region (near modern Xillingol) when he met his bride-to-be, a woman named Majikhan. As husband and wife they lived among other poor nomads, and earned a pittance by through laboring jobs when these were available. They were poor, but honest and hard-working.

In his book *Trails to Inmost Asia,* explorer George Roerich described a typical band of nomads that must have been comparable to Danzan Rabjaa's parents.

> There seems to be a perceptible difference between the type of Mongols of the grass country of northern Mongolia, and that of the Mongol nomads dwelling in the Gobi, south of

> the Khangai Mountains and north of the Mongolian or Desert Altai. The northern Khalkha Mongol is stronger in build and is generally better dressed, being fond of bright colored silks and cloth. The nomads of the barren country round the Gobi Altai are often of smaller in stature, as if the unfavorable conditions of their life in the desert had checked their physical development. . . . Their long unkempt tresses of black hair gave the company a wild look.[2]

Returning to the legend, this poor yet honest pair must have been attractive to the spirit that had just fled the home of Ekh Dagina. Content with its discovery, 'the spirit' became part of Majikhan's first and only son, whom the couple named Rabjaa. It is said that when Dulduit received this baby into his scarf, he momentarily 'radiated light,' which, as Pozdneyev noted, was a characteristic trait for the birth of a khuvilgan.

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Rabjaa is a Tibetan word for "spreading out" or "blossoming." The exact time, date and place of Rabjaa's birth are open to debate. Some researchers suggest he was born at noon on Christmas day, 1803, while others argue it was between 10am and 11am on January 8, 1804. The birthplace is considered to be Dulaan Khar (Warm Blackness), in the northern part of Zuun Bayan sum, a region which has alluring areas named Tooroigon Togol (Wild Boar Grove), Khulangiin Shand (Wild Ass Pond), Suvragiin Khailaas (Elm Temple) and Zagiin Shugui (Saxaul Bush). Danzan Rabjaa's birthplace is now considered a holy site, a monument was erected in 1988 and herders respect it by not placing their gers there.

After having her child, so the story continues, Dulduit's wife grew hungry. Mongol custom dictates that a woman should eat fresh meat soup after she has given birth. Dulduit wandered off in search of food and encountered a traveling camel breeder named Tumor who was employed by an aristocrat. Tumor gave Dulduit the shinbone of a camel, which contained excellent fresh marrow. This was considered an auspicious sign and Dulduit believed he had received a special baby.

Dulduit, Majikhan and baby Rabjaa stayed near Dulaan Khar for three years. But the area was not safe, especially for a child. There was little protection from the sun and wind, not to mention the large number of snakes in the area.

In 1805 they moved to Örgön sum and it was in this year that Rabjaa's mother died of illness, leaving Dulduit alone with his two-year-old child.[3]

The year 1807 brought a *zud*, the Mongolian term for severe winter. It was an especially hard time for Dulduit and his son as they sought shelter with whatever family would house them. Exposure to the freezing cold and blizzards had a tremendous effect on Rabjaa. He grew up strong and resistant to pain and suffering. The father and son endured the misery of hunger and homelessness until an even greater tragedy struck; that summer a wolf killed Dulduit's only horse at a place called Khorogiin Kheer. Seeking revenge, Dulduit waited for three days by the corpse of the horse with his crude flintlock gun. The wolf did not return and years later Rabjaa mentions the incident in his biography as a lesson about fate, vengeance and the relationship between man and beast.

A series of 'mystical' events then occurred that led local people into believing that Rabjaa was the reincarnation of the Fourth Noyon Khutagt. In one of these incidents Rabjaa and his father met a family that was packing up their belongings, preparing to move to new pastures. The family had no time to help the beggar pair. The woman of the ger handed Rabjaa a few scraps of food, but the boy was glaring at the greasy pot, just left over from a hot meal. Upon seeing this, the woman told him to lick the pot, if he were really that hungry.

As Rabjaa ate the leftovers, one arrogant family member said if Rabjaa were so desperate for food, he ought to lick both sides of the pot. Little Rabjaa, never one to back down from a challenge, grasped the iron cauldron and 'miraculously' turned it inside out. With the greasy innards of the pot now on the exterior, Rabjaa proceeded to lick it clean, and asked his host if he had performed the task correctly. The amazed family immediately stopped their work and organized a feast in honor of the magical boy.[4]

Another childhood tale describes how Rabjaa reclaimed the knife and fire starter which once belonged to the fourth incarnate, Jamyn Oidov Jampts. In their wanderings, Rabjaa and his father heard from others that a high ranking Manchu juntung was traveling from Peking to Uliastai, a military outpost where a large division of soldiers was stationed. Because the caravan was passing nearby, Rabjaa insisted upon visiting the juntung. Dulduit agreed and they set off for the camp on a borrowed horse.

On reaching the camp, Dulduit asked the tent guard if he and his son could visit the juntung. The disapproving guard turned them away but little Rabjaa was adamant and shouted, "No event is complete in just one lifetime! I would like to speak with the juntung about my previous life!" The boy's sharp tongue surprised the guard but still he resisted. The juntung heard the commotion outside and invited Rabjaa to enter his tent. Dulduit kowtowed before the juntung but Rabjaa refused to give due respect.

"You have my knife and fire starter," he blurted out.

The juntung, taken aback, asked him to wait and left the tent. He returned with a package, unraveled the cloth and revealed the old silver knife and fire starter given to him by the Fourth Noyon Khutagt. Rabjaa touched the objects lovingly and thanked the juntung for returning 'his' belongings.

While there are other myths about Rabjaa's childhood, one of the few events believed to be based on actual fact occurred during his seventh year. It was at this time that Rabjaa and his father joined an autumn feast hosted by a family of wealthy herders. Because of their low rank in society, the pair was assigned a place on the floor near the door of the ger, traditionally the least respected area, usually reserved for children.

The feasting began and the people who had crowded into the tent were satisfied with the massive quantities of food and drink. As the celebration continued a cloudburst erupted overhead and raindrops pelted the tent. Much to the surprise and shock of the guests, the only section of the ger that leaked was the honored northern end where the most important people sit, including the head of the household. The visitors observed with horror as the less-honorable south end of the ger remained dry while the contemptuous host was soaked and humiliated.

"Why are these rain drops not falling on the heads of that ragged pair?!" the host said angrily. He pointed to Dulduit and his son. In response, Rabjaa composed a song, 'The Heavenly Sky,' or *Khurmast Tenger*. The first two stanzas are what he sang at the time and the following verses were added later.

Heaven is complete.
Let's hold and enjoy eight magic feasts.
When clouds appear and the time of rain comes,

What is the difference between the altar and the door?
When the activities cease and the time of death comes,
What is the difference between old and young?

When you plant a moilor tree,
A snake and poison will come from the tree.
When you make friends with a bad person,
You will learn bad things from them.

When you plant a spreading tree,
From each branch the fruits will come.
When you have friendship with a good person,
Brightness and wisdom will appear.

Even though there are many heavenly stars,
The brightest ones are only one or two.
Even though there are many earthly creatures,
The wisest ones are only one or two.

They say that cold weather brings a chilly wind,
And that the ravine plants will revive
When you are happy.
Talk about unhappiness produces unhappiness.
Zee zee hoo, zen vaiduu ze, (have mercy,) three saints[5]

The historian Walther Heissig writes that we can't necessarily assume a seven-year old created this poem out of the blue. Because the song has Shamanic overtones, it may have been derived from very old phraseology. Note this old Shamanic saying: "She is afflicted with an infectious disease, (to cure her), what is the difference between the lama and layman (doctor)?" Or: "If one is afflicted with an infectious disease, what is the difference between old and young?"[6]

While his host must surely have been offended, the other guests in the ger were secretly impressed with Rabjaa's creativity and his ability to reference karma and Shamanic philosophy. Some joked that he must be a reincarnated saint, perhaps even the Fifth Noyon Khutagt! They were more right than they knew.

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The eventual meeting between Rabjaa and Jintu Gonchig occurred in the snake year of 1809. Jintu had been traveling across the countryside for several years, interviewing young boys as he went, but had not yet found a child who he believed was the true incarnation of his former mentor.

It is said that Jintu Gonchig first identified Rabjaa at a summer feast at Tsagaan Tsav (modern day Mandakh sum), an area of natural beauty that is littered with petrified trees. At this festival, Jintu came upon Rabjaa and proceeded to question the boy in the typical fashion. Certain answers and signs immediately caught his attention. For example, Rabjaa identified a collection of Jintu's objects as his own, including a jade cup and a string of rosary beads once owned by the Fourth Noyon Khutagt.

Both of these items are now on display at the Danzanravjaa Museum. The rosary, created by the First Noyon Khutagt, contains 108 beads fashioned from the skulls of 108 skilled lamas. Each is inlaid with silver, gold and lapis lazuli. Making a rosary from human skulls was not unusual; as the beads are turned, the knowledge of the deceased lama helps to propel the prayer. Buddhist monks typically used other parts of the human body for creating their religious tools. The ganlin horn, a type of trumpet, was traditionally made from the femur of a 16-year-old virgin girl. Lamas' skulls were used to produce drinking cups and double-sided ritual drums. To drink from the skull of a well-versed lama is said to acquire his knowledge.

But most impressive was Rabjaa's claim that Jintu's horse was also his. Just as Jamyn Oidov Jampts had predicted, the horse from the Peking market connected them in the next life, a classic mark of Asian story telling. Jintu had no doubt that this six-year old was the incarnation he had sought for so long, and he brought him to Ongiin Gol monastery (modern day Saikhan Ovoo sum, Dundgov Aimag) for his enthronement.

En route to the Ongiin Gol monastery, Rabjaa passed through Tusheet Gun khoshuu, where he met an aristocrat, Toin Puntsag. The nobleman invited young Rabjaa into his tent to meet his mentally disturbed younger sister. Legend states that Rabjaa cured her ailment with his touch. In exchange for the miracle, the nobleman gave Rabjaa a black horse, which he rode to the enthronement ceremony. The living Buddha of Ongiin Gol Monastery, Ishdonilhudev Rinpoche, welcomed Rabjaa when he finally reached the temple.

Rabjaa's procession and coronation was, presumably, a widely celebrated and official event. There are no detailed descriptions of this particular enthronement, but according to Pozdneyev, every khutagt and khuvilgan was given, quite literally, the royal treatment. Typically, a living Buddha would stay with his own family until the age of five or six. On an appointed day the child would be escorted in a long, colorful and slow parade to the monastery. The young khuvilgan was seated upon his throne, presented with silk scarves and ceremonial ornaments, and sung a hymn of praise.

A shower of gifts from the lamas and laypeople followed. When Pozdneyev met the khuvilgan of Orombo Monastery, he recorded that at his enthronement the boy received in total 1,540 horses, 800 oxen, and over 1,000 sheep. Other gifts included gold and silver icons, animal pelts, silk, riding horses, a furnished ger and special embroidered wardrobes for each season of the year. Following the ceremony, a feast and *naadam* (sports festival) was usually held.[7]

Rabjaa's enthronement was unique in that he was not actually named as the Fifth Noyon Khutagt. The lamas of the time, and especially Ishdonilhudev Rinpoche and Jintu Gonchig, still feared the Manchu Imperial Order that banned this title.

Therefore rather than call him the Fifth Noyon Khutagt they instead granted him the title of Avshaa Gegeen, which had been held by a recently deceased lama named Navaan Agramba Tsorj.

For this reason Rabjaa began his life officially recognized in Peking as "The Incarnation of Avshaa," although the Mongol lamas privately knew him as the Fifth Noyon Khutagt.

When the enthronement ceremony was complete, the peasant boy who had once begged for scraps of food was elevated to a status higher than any other in the Gobi and revered as the Princely Saint, Lord of the Gobi.

Chapter Three: Incidents of Youth

The restrictions of the monasteries must have been a great inconvenience to Rabjaa, who had never before experienced orders and regulations. As a peasant boy with a sharp tongue and healthy disrespect for authority, one can only guess what sort of trouble he caused for his minders. His worldview, one developed from both the sorrow of poverty and the love of his parents, must have seemed negative and cynical, but also sensitive. These troubled emotions were soon brought forth with pen and paper at hand and as Rabjaa grew older his talents as a songwriter and artist became more apparent.

Rabjaa's Buddhist studies took him to different monastic institutions in both Outer and Inner Mongolia. His father, however, was not so fortunate; Rabjaa's minders sent him away so that the young prodigy could tend more closely to his studies. Legend says that Dulduit was given a small pension to survive with, but this did not last long and he soon returned to his life of song and aimless wanderings. Dulduit died a pauper nine years later.

Having finished with Dulduit, it is important to mention several points about Rabjaa's parents. Firstly, there is reason to believe that "Dulduit" was only a nickname. Later in life Rabjaa sometimes ended his compositions and poems by signing his name: "The son of Ulziit has just screamed." Dulduit was probably a moniker he picked up from his years as a beggar. A *dulduichin* was a person who attracted an audience with a bell, and then sang songs or read prayers in exchange for money or the like. Dulduit was probably a shortened form of *dulduichin*.

Furthermore it's possible that Ulziit was not Rabjaa's father at all but actually his mother and the stories about Rabjaa wandering around the desert with his father have lost their accuracy to time. This theory was first proposed by the scholar Ts. Damdinsuren, who pointed out that nowhere in Rabjaa's biography does he mention his father, although he writes, 'Dulduit my mother' several times. Further, Rabjaa often dedicated poems to his mother, but never his father, who only seems to be mentioned in the last poem he would ever write. Damdinsuren considers that it is only through oral tradition and myth-making that people came to believe Dulduit was the father.

It is also possible that an error occurred when monks read the original biography. Therefore 'ejee' (mother), became 'ajaa' (father).

Further evidence was identified by the Czech writer Marta Kirapolska who cites a quote from one of the biographies on Rabjaa.

> Even if I am a man who has (much knowledge of) the Dharma, I called the learned teachers and other lamas to perform religious services when my mother Dulduit died on the second day of the new moon of the first summer month of the snake year (assumed 1821), because a living being has nothing more precious than a mother, and she is as (difficult) to find as a star by daylight, and because there is no better way (to perform) filial piety for (one's) gracious mother than (to help her achieve) Buddha(hood).[1]

Because Rabjaa recorded this after he had entered the monastery, the quote discredits the myth that his mother died shortly after his birth. If the quote is accurate, then it seems that the many stories about Rabjaa's father were in fact about his mother.

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In 1812, Rabjaa's minders sent a request to Khuree for an audience with the Fourth Bogd Gegeen, making an offering of 1,000 silver *lang*, along with valuable images of the Buddha. The application was accepted, and he travelled north across the Gobi in a richly adorned caravan to the Bogd's residence in Khuree. On this occasion the Fourth Bogd Gegeen gave him the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual name Lobsang Tenzin Rabgya, which in Mongolian pronunciation became Lobson Danzan Rabjaa. This became shortened to Danzan Rabjaa in common use.

In addition to a silver cup and a special *khadak* (silk scarf), the Bogd Lama also allowed Rabjaa the honor of sitting on top of five *olboks* (a small square carpet) during religious ceremonies, signifying his status as an incarnate lama.

Rabjaa's early studies included a brief trip to Peking, where he was introduced to spiritual leaders, including a high-ranking Chinese monk named Yung-ho Kung. He would also have met secular leaders, and possibly even the Manchu emperor himself.[2]

Legend says that the Fourth Panchen Lama (the Seventh in the Communist Chinese way of counting; see Chronology) was in Peking at the time and met Rabjaa, examining the young boy to determine his legitimacy as an incarnate lama. When asked to describe his family, the boy referred to his mother as "The Swan," a symbol that he would mention more frequently in his writings years later.

Rabjaa's initial studies were conducted at the desert monastery of Ongiin Gol, where he had been enthroned. Here he was given basic teachings on Buddhist philosophy and practice, and was required to memorize the standard Buddhist liturgical texts.

His studies, however, did not proceed as smoothly as his instructors would have hoped. The lamas at Ongiin Gol noted that he was not particularly attentive. Furthermore, he often ran away from the monastery to hide out with the livestock breeders. Having grown up in rural areas, he no doubt had a strong affinity with them.

During one of these legendary escapes from the monastery he came upon a woman milking her cows. Meanwhile, a large brown bull was bucking about and constantly pestering her. The woman grew frustrated and, upon seeing young Rabjaa, ordered him to hold the bull.

Rabjaa's attempts to control the beast were unsuccessful. He was simply too small. Seeing this, the woman mumbled that Rabjaa was an ignorant and weak boy. Then suddenly the bull stopped kicking altogether and stood motionless by the ger.

Rabjaa remained at the ger for the night and, when it was time to sleep, the woman gave him only some tattered rags as bedding. Her small daughter took pity on Rabjaa and offered him her mattress and blanket.

The next morning the woman of the ger went outside and noticed that the bull was still motionless. The shaggy beast was pushed, pulled and smacked, but remained as solid as stone. The hosts realized that Rabjaa must have cast a spell on the bull in return for the mistreatment he had received, and they fell to their knees before him and asked for forgiveness.

"You should be kind to all people without prejudice, including orphans and the poor," said Rabjaa. "Now you should give clothes and food to seven poor lamas to repent for your bad conduct."

Before departing, Rabjaa gave the kind daughter a silk scarf and predicted, "You will have a happy life, and will be the mother of three wonderful boys." As he left, the old bull started to move and meandered over to the other cows grazing in the field.[3]

Young khuvilgans spent much of their time with the old teachers. It was a rare event that khuvilgans were allowed to see other children, let alone play with them. Frolicking was discouraged and naughty behavior reprimanded. The older monks taught new recruits the fundamentals of Buddhism as well as other subjects including history, astronomy and literature. Creative skills were developed through drawing and modeling with clay. From Pozdneyev's point-of-view (both arrogant and quite ignorant of Buddhist teachings), the lamas also practiced a vigorous form of brainwashing, whereby they taught the child about his 'past lives,' including what the former incarnates owned, what they studied, where they traveled and what miracles they performed.

The monks also described to the young khuvilgan what their soul was experiencing in other realms between the births. As Pozdneyev relates, the child became utterly convinced he was a living god, and for the rest of his life would have stories of a mystical past and former incarnations deeply embedded within his psyche.[4]

While this may have been a part of Rabjaa's early education, he was also exposed to art, music and chess, especially after he reached the age of eleven, when he was allowed more freedom to move about the monastery and interact with others. According to the typical education given to a novice lama, he is likely to have received six hours of Buddhist lessons per day.

Rabjaa, it is said, had a particular affinity for languages and was given instruction in Tibetan, Chinese, Mongolian and Manchu. Other stories suggest he also learned a few words of Russian and English from explorers, traders and travelers.

In 1817, at the age of fourteen, he left Ongiin Gol and was sent to Badgar Choilin Monastery in the Alasha (noted on some maps as Alxa) area of western Inner Mongolia. He stayed here for between three years and five years, receiving an education in the Buddhist classics. It was during this time that he took the *getsul* vows of a novice monk. He now was granted permission to publicly perform spiritual works. He began accepting visitors for spiritual consultations and blessings, and was permitted to lead Buddhist rites. He was also considered old enough to perform divinations and prayer healings.

In 1822, now in his nineteenth year, he completed his basic Buddhist training and began construction on his first temple, the Labrang Süm of the Ordos Region (not to be confused with the more famous Labrang Temple in modern Gansu province of China). He founded at least one more temple in the year 1823. [5]

At this young and impressionable stage in his life, Alasha must also have had a considerable influence on his creative talents. Tsam mask dancing, Chinese opera and folk songs were the seeds for his early writings. Rabjaa studied the poetry of Tibetan writers such as Rongbo Galdan Gyamtso and perhaps read the songs of love and wine ascribed to the Sixth Dalai Lama, who also had spent many years in the Alasha area.

In his early years Danzan Rabjaa met several times with the spiritual head of Doloon Nuur, the Fourth Janjiya Khutagt (1787 -1846), an important leader of the Gelugpa Buddhists. The two became close friends, as well as mentor and disciple. It likely that the Janjiya Khutagt had significant spiritual influence on Rabjaa; encouraging him to follow the Gelugpa faith as well as the Nyingma tradition.

Rabjaa made several trips to Doloon Nuur (Seven Lakes) through the course of their relationship. On one such trip, in 1825, he arrived with two consorts and 100 of his own disciples for the purposes of making herbal medicines. [6]

Doloon Nuur, Khuree's sister city, was located just 250 miles north of Peking and not far from the site of Khublai Khan's summer capital Xanadu (Shangdu). Nowadays it is an unremarkable town whose population of 100,000 people is comprised almost exclusively of Chinese traders and peasants, with hardly a lama among them. A flat and sprawling mass of concrete and brick buildings, it is surrounded on all sides by fields of hay and vegetables. Although unremarkable, it has certainly improved since the days when the Abbé Huc visited the city in 1842. He described it extensively:

> Toloon-Noor is not a walled city, but a vast agglomeration of hideous houses, which seem to have been thrown together with a pitchfork. The carriage portion of the streets is a marsh of mud and putrid filth, deep enough to stifle and bury the smaller beasts of burden that not infrequently fall within it, and those carcasses remain to aggravate the general stench; while their loads become the prey of the innumerable thieves who are ever on the alert.

> Yet despite the nastiness of the town itself, the sterility of its environs, the excessive cold of its winter, and the intolerable heat of its summer, its population is immense, and its commerce enormous. Russian merchandise is brought hither in large quantities by way of (Khiakhtia). The Tartars bring incessant herds of camels, oxen and horses, and carry back in exchange tobacco, linen and tea... The trade of Toloon-Noor is mostly in the hands of men from the provinces of Shansi... In this vast emporium, the Chinese invariably make fortunes, and the Tartars are invariably ruined. Toloon-Noor, in fact, is a sort of great pneumatic pump, constantly at work in emptying the pockets of the unlucky Mongols. [7]

In its heyday Doloon Nuur (now simply known as Doloon) was famed for its craftsmen and ironworkers. Huge bronze statues were created here and sent to monasteries in Tibet and Mongolia. The Abbé Huc, who had a bronze statue of Jesus Christ cast here, describes seeing a train of six camels leaving the city laden with parts of a Buddhist statue to be assembled in Lhasa for the Dalai Lama. Khuree likewise received a fine Buddhist image from Doloon Nuur, sent across the Gobi Desert in seven parts. The statue was placed in the Maidari Temple, which was once part of Zuun Khuree, but which no longer exists.

It is unclear as to where Danzan Rabjaa studied in Doloon Nuur, although the most likely place was the Shar Süm (Yellow Temple), the largest temple complex in the city. Sadly, the Shar Süm no longer exists; according to a local curator, it was completely destroyed in 1945 by the Soviet Red Army during the final throes of WWII.[8] We are left, however, with a description of the temples, provided by Pozdneyev who visited Doloon Nuur in 1892 (or 1893).

> The facades and architecture of these temples struck me as strongly reminiscent of the assembly hall in the Khalka Amarbayasgalant, except that the latter is made of wood, while the Doloon Nuur temples are of masonry and are ornamented in an incomparably more delicate, elegant, and lavish style than the Amarbayasgalant one. The designs of their cornices, the abundance of the most fantastic sculpture, marvelous reliefs, and the graceful tapering, polished, and gilded columns: all this is really strikingly lovely and causes no small wonder in any beholder.[9]

Dating from 1691, the Yellow Temple, at its height, housed several thousand monks studying the arts and astronomy. This temple is believed to have been commissioned by Emperor Kangxi as a gift for Mongolia's spiritual leader Zanabazar. An earlier complex on the same site had been destroyed by fire, and the construction of the Yellow Temple was funded with 120,000 silver coins given by the Manchu government, as part of a scheme to promote unity between Inner and Outer Mongolia. The Manchus had recently subdued the latter and the Yellow Temple was designated as a symbolic intermediary between the two Mongol states. The monastery grew in importance in 1732 after the Second Bogd Gegeen of Mongolia fled violence in Khuree and was taken there for his own safety. By that time some 3,000 lamas were living in the monastery and another 4,000 lived in the city itself. Money poured in as Doloon Nuur became a popular pilgrimage site.[10]

Although the Yellow Temple no longer exists, there still remains in Doloon Nuur the former residence of the Janjiya Khutagt, a site known as Hui Zong Si. The buildings were located next to the Yellow Temple and it's likely that Danzan Rabjaa was a frequent visitor here.

As well as delving into intensive Buddhist studies, Rabjaa also used Doloon Nuur as a staging point for visits to Peking. From Doloon Nuur, Rabjaa also made at least one pilgrimage with the Janjiya Khutagt to the holy mountain Wutai Shan where in 1825 he composed the twelve verses of 'Pure and Clear,' dedicating it to his elder companion. It was one of Rabjaa's early masterpieces, and was followed by several other popular poems, including 'The Kite,' which was penned in 1826.

Rabjaa spent the year 1826 in Peking, where he studied science, art, and literature with other khuvilgans and high lamas. Legend tells that at this time he also held an audience with the Manchu Emperor. Gaining an audience with the Emperor was extremely rare, and often took up to one year to schedule.

Although not nearly as in demand as the Bogd Gegeen, Danzan Rabjaa, even in his younger years, received a steady stream of visitors seeking his blessing. His popularity continued to grow as he transitioned from student to teacher, and the list of the devout seeking his council grew even longer.

When people of high rank or authority wanted an audience with a khuvilgan, they at first needed to overcome a lengthy bureaucratic process. First a message was sent to the khuvilgan, explaining in detail the purpose of the visit and the hour of arrival. The khuvilgan, if he consented to the audience, then sent a letter of invitation. On the day of the meeting, the monk and his visitor would meet outside the temple hall or meeting room, each giving a slight bow. Then began the difficult process of who should enter the room first, and once inside, where each was to sit. The person of highest rank entered first and sat at the northern part of the room. All this was done according to unwritten rules of rank. Manchu officials typically considered themselves of highest rank, an assumption which often irritated the Mongols. The khuvilgan ranked under the Manchus.

A meeting would typically begin with the exchange of greetings and pleasantries. Formalities only lightened with the occasional draining of brandy or vodka bottles. In a ceremonial end to the meeting, the khuvilgan presented a gift and blessing to his guest.

Ordinary people did not need to go through such formal procedures. Their experience with the khuvilgan, however, could hardly be deemed social. The devotee would silently enter the khuvilgans' quarters and prostrate himself three times. The living Buddha would then give blessings by touching the pilgrim's head with his hands or a book. Satisfied and humbled, the worshipper would offer a prayer and then slip out of the room.

Some travelers described how the khuvilgans would sometimes play practical jokes on the commoners who came for a blessing. Pozdneyev wrote about a monk with whom he stayed in Inner Mongolia,

> (The Orombo Gegeen) was terribly bored by these admirers, and then instead of placing a holy book on the head of the praying person, he whacked them on the head with a sword, or even gave them a push with his foot, or filliped him on his pate. All this does not in the least offend the religious feeling of the Mongols; on the contrary the more eccentric the escapade, the more it makes the son of the steppes be thoughtful... If later in the life of that Mongol something important happened, the khuvilgan's innocent prank will be given suitable signification by the lamas.[11]

A visit by a foreigner was always a pleasant surprise and gave the senior monks an opportunity to make inquiries about foreign lands and world affairs. Because of such contact the khuvilgans, compared to other Mongols, were well-informed. Russian visitors, compared to Chinese ones, were particularly well-liked as they provided Mongolia's only window to the West. Such visits were also an opportunity for the monks to exchange valued gifts. Pozdneyev noted that most senior monks he visited possessed a variety of knickknacks from Europe and elsewhere in Asia. Their shelves were filled with old watches, clocks, microscopes, globes and photographs, the classifying of which occupied much of their time.

When in his mid-20s Danzan Rabjaa began to exhibit a growing interest in tsam masked temple dances, which he studied at various monasteries in Inner Mongolia. He built the Duinkhor quarter of Khamaryn Khiid in 1827 specifically for the purpose of staging tsam dances.

The following year he returned to Doloon Nuur to visit his guru the Janjiya Khutagt. He used the journey as an opportunity to visit numerous other monasteries along the Mongolian-Chinese border area.

Before the year ended he was in the Galbaa Gobi region of Outer Mongolia (modern Khanbogd sum, Ömnögov Aimag), where he started the construction of three monasteries: Demchog, Ulaan Sakhosnii Khiid (named after his personal Dharma Protector Deity) and Sayan Tolai Khiid. The project took six years to complete. The money to build such grand edifices was gathered from offerings made by the pilgrims who visited him, and donations made by his followers. Today these monasteries, all in ruins, are known collectively as Gurvan Galbiin Khiid.

Ulaan Sakhosnii Khiid was the best known of the three and its remains can still be found today. The main temple was placed close to a cave. Brick walls enclosed the area between the rocky outer portion of the cave and the temple. Within this yard, Rabjaa built an artificial lake and stream with artificial rock mountains. It must have resembled, in some distant way, a Japanese zen garden. Danzan Rabjaa did have at least one Japanese disciple, and it was possibly this student who designed the garden grounds. At the dedication of these temples Rabjaa sang songs and read poetry. He invited hundreds of mothers (legends say 10,000) to the event and gave them seats of honor, as a way of publicly declaring his strong respect for women.

After laying the groundwork for these buildings Rabjaa was off again. In 1829 he visited the temples of the Chahar region, painting, teaching and studying tsam as he went. He visited a well-known pilgrimage site called the Cave of the Great Horseman, which had a temple nearby that hosted tsam dancing.

Before the end of the year he made a brief trip to the Yellow Temple of Doloon Nuur, where he received the secular title Van Janan, and then retuned to Chahar to visit the Burdiin Temple (Gul Tsagaan region).

In 1831 he spent time excavating a ruined temple. Why he chose to excavate this site is unknown, although the most likely reason was that he was preparing to rebuild the temple atop the ruined foundations. A year later he returned to his base at Khamaryn Khiid to concentrate on the staging of his play *Saran Khökhöö*.[12]

Among the many temples and monasteries that he created during his lifetime, the most important was probably Khamaryn Khiid. The buildings on this site were completed in 1822, replacing the complex that had been closed by the Manchus after the death of Jamyn Oidov Jampts.

The project had begun with an analysis of the best possible location of his new monastery. For this he turned to his old guru, the Janjiya Khutagt of Doloon Nuur Monastery. He also consulted an assistant named Doyod, an old friend who was skilled at finding springs and underground water sources. Together they crossed the harsh landscape of the Gobi in search of a suitable place for a new monastery.

At last they came to a place called Övör Khamar, which was marked by a stupa and made habitable by a spring and a saxaul forest. A study was made of the area: trees were counted, water located and the terrain surveyed.

An extra in the story is one Khilenhormoi, a dark-skinned, muscular old cowboy-like bandit who lived the area. Khilenhormoi was one of Mongolia's most notorious *Sain Er*, or highwayman.

Crouched down in a hunting bunker, Khilenhormoi kept a wary eye on Danzan Rabjaa as the monk approached. Rabjaa liked the bunker and thought it would offer good protection for his temples against bandits.

Rabjaa approached Khilenhormoi, but the bandit only ignored Rabjaa and his companions. A bloody, dirty gazelle carcass was lying at his side, causing the lamas to turn away in disgust. But Rabjaa was not deterred. He spoke kindly with Khilenhormoi and his magnetism cast a spell over the hardened cowboy. They became friends and Rabjaa later employed this 'good fellow' to work as a guard at the monastery.

After Rabjaa had selected the spot for his new monastery he set about digging wells in the surrounding area. One day he was surveying northwest of the monastery and announced that a new well would be dug at the top of a hill. One look at the dry rocky mound caused concern among Rabjaa's students who stated emphatically that no water could come from it. To which Rabjaa stated:

"If your head is pierced what things would come out? It's a natural law that strong and weak matter are found together. So where there are hard stones, there will be groundwater."

Rabjaa's students reluctantly dug, and after half a fathom, clear and cold water poured forth. Their faith restored in the Khutagt, they erected a fence around the new well.

Another version of this story explains that, while standing by the Lavriin Temple of his monastery, Rabjaa took his bow and arrow - used in his tsam dances - and announced that wherever his arrow would land was the place where a new well would be dug. Sure enough his disciples found groundwater in the place where his arrow fell. Yet another version has it that the water sprung forth because salt water, used to clean the corpses of the Third and Fourth Khutagts, had been poured on this spot.

Rabjaa proclaimed the water to be holy and said its properties could cure ailments of the teeth, eyes, blood, joints and liver. There were many customs associated with this spring: women were not allowed to stir the water, animals could not be brought there, the water could not be collected with a metal cup, and women could not go near it if they had any exposed wounds.

The spring was maintained until 1938, the year Khamaryn Khiid was destroyed. In 1970, when Buddhism was still outlawed in Mongolia, attempts made to restore the well all failed. Then in 1991, a year after Buddhism returned, two local people dug on the spot and struck the same cold water Rabjaa had found 150 years before. In the year 2000, a protective hexagonal structure was built around the spring to ensure the protection of its curative waters.

Khamaryn Khiid was comprised of four parts: Zuun Khuree, Baruun Khuree, Tsokhon and Duinkhor. Rabjaa usually remained in the Zuun Khuree area, which included the Lavriin temple, a library, and a school for young lamas. A temple was built in the Zuun Khuree complex to house the remains of the Fourth Noyon Khutagt, and later the Sixth Noyon Khutagt would be interred here.

Baruun Khuree contained the Givadiin Rabjaaliin temple-museum and a cooking area. The Duinkhor quarter held temples as well as the theater where Rabjaa staged his operas. At its height, the entire monastery contained 13 temples (with 22 chapels), two stupas and 11 smaller buildings, plus gers that housed 500 monks and nuns.[13]

Danzan Rabjaa was a practical man. In his poem, "By All Kinds of Things" he wrote:

> You have been born as a human being;
> Don't do anything that is not necessary.
> You propitiate the Dharma Protector Mahakala;
> Always think about good things for your society.[14]

From Rabjaa's building works and the focus he gave to them we can see that on the one hand he was able to accomplish tasks quickly and efficiently, and also that he was very much concerned with the idea that his creations should be of benefit to society. His various projects were governed by both of these principles.

For example, he once asked his monks to build an extraordinarily large number of livestock stables, explaining that Buddhism would some day suffer and future generations would have more use for stables than monasteries.

It was said that the slow and apathetic work of the monks in building these stables infuriated Rabjaa. "We are building these stables for the future, don't you know this?!" Rabjaa bellowed. "Why are you all so lazy? Do you think a world dependent on time is eternal?"

His cowering disciples asked, "You are leading this blessed work, so why do you say such harsh words?"

Rabjaa replied, "Nothing in this world is eternal, and human behavior will always change. The circumstances of Buddhism also change. There are times when it has flourished and times when it has suffered. It will be the same in the future. So we must take advantage of this period of blessing and work hard to create things, for the sake of our children. In the future, people will kick and destroy the Dharma, but they will still need food. These stables will be a blessing for them."

The story shows, as does the verse from "By All Kinds of Things", that Rabjaa believed strongly in preparing his people for any eventualities that could occur.

It would appear that Rabjaa correctly predicted the fate of Buddhism in Mongolia, for a century later Communist forces went to great lengths to ensure the utter destruction of the enlightenment tradition.

The era of suffering for Mongolia's monks lasted sixty years, from the late 1920s to the late 1980s. Interestingly, the cycle of benevolent and malevolent periods for Buddhism as mentioned by Rabjaa can also last 60 years, or five cycles of the 12-year lunar calendar.

Mongolia's re-emergence of Buddhism has, among many other things, allowed for a better understanding of Danzan Rabjaa. Before 1990, much of the known information regarding this monk was based upon myth. Understanding his life from a Buddhist perspective was difficult given the restrictions of the time.

The emergence of democracy and the rebirth of Buddhism has allowed researchers to study Rabjaa's activities from a more philosophical and religious point of view.

What they discovered is that Rabjaa was not debauched, as had been so enthusiastically portrayed by the Communists, but to the contrary was a brilliant and creative genius, although somewhat eccentric.

The next chapter will explore Rabjaa's own unique and personal relationship with the Buddhist faith.

Chapter Four: Rabjaa and Buddhism

Altangerel, the curator of the Danzanravjaa Museum in Dornogobi, has one artifact in his collection that he keeps under lock and key in his private office. It is a book with 108 pages, each one tied to the next so that it unfolds like an accordion. On each page is a crude line drawing of a man and woman in various sexual positions. The artwork is unspectacular and nothing like the complex color paintings that adorn the walls of monasteries. In comparison with the other artwork within the museum, these are rather amateurish. Still, Altangerel recognizes its obvious appeal and knows that if anything were to be stolen from his museum, it would be this book.

Alcohol and sex were fairly common in Mongolia's monasteries, particularly during Danzan Rabjaa's lifetime. The strict traditions of the Yellow School that prohibited these indulgences were unlikely to have ever been followed very closely.

However, Danzan Rabjaa's apparent addiction to both alcohol and sex must have seemed an extreme case, and was certainly enough to bring criticism from senior monks.

Perhaps Danzan Rabjaa engaged in very high levels of tantric practice, and did not feel bound by the ordinary laws of Buddhism. After a certain level of realization, the letter of the monk vows may have been overlooked. His poetry stresses virtue, morality and the bodhisattva vow, and it is perhaps this vow that supersedes any other formal monastic vows he might have taken.

He did not consider sex something that should be dark or hidden and did not forbid his disciples from engaging in sexual activities. In fact, he suggested they could learn from their sexual encounters, that these encounters could improve their meditation and assist in their ultimate goal of understanding. He was possibly using tantric imagery, if not encouraging tantric yab/yum practice.

When he chose to meditate, Rabjaa would usually retreat to the Yalkhoi Caves located near Khamaryn Khiid. Here the complex of "108 caves for the 108 students" are a series of niches in the volcanic rock, with the caves being set between dry wash ravines. They are named after the deity who protects them, Yalkhoi, who is often featured in paintings riding a red goat. Most caves here are nothing more than table-sized notches in the red walls, but one or two are big enough to fit a dozen huddled monks. The number 108 seems to be merely symbolic.

One cave in particular has a unique function. In reality it is more of an overhang than a cave. Pilgrims believe that crawling through this small passage purifies negative karmas collected over many lifetimes.

The promontory above these caves is called Offering Hill, and is so named for a legendary vulture that reputedly comes here to offer food - in the form of dead rodents - in exchange for spiritual protection from Yalkhoi.

Today many of the caves still contain Buddhist tokens: carved stones, silk scarves, bits of jewelry and coins. In the largest cavern, an altar bears a photo of the Seventh Noyon Khutagt. These are not leftover relics from decades past.

It was considered an honorable task for the monks of Khamaryn Khiid to perform the strict 108-day retreat at the caves. To begin this retreat, the monk would enter one of the tiny caves and allow his peers to seal him up behind a wall of bricks or stones. A small hole was left in the wall of the cave. One meal arrived each day in a wooden cup. Once he had eaten the food, the monk would turn the cup over and scraped the rim three times before pushing it outside again, thus making the cup shrink each day.

Every day the cup was returned with food, but by the 54th day it had become scraped down to the wood base, and therefore was discarded. The monk would therefore completely fast for the remaining 54 days.

After 108 days the wall was knocked down and the monk brought out. It is said that just 12 monks from Khamaryn Khiid managed the entire 108 days.

After a few days of rest each successful retreatant was surrounded by his peers, who read sutras in his honor. Legends claim that sixty cartloads of scriptures would be read. It was believed that the monk, so soon after his retreat, had gained extraordinary powers and would memorize all that was read to him.

Upon completion of the sutra reading, the monk was taken back to the sacred caves and asked to display his newfound abilities. A *purba* (small ritual dagger) was set on the ground about ten feet from the monk, who was encouraged to use the power of thought to raise it from the ground, make it turn in mid-air, and then make it fall back, point-first, into the earth. Anyone who could perform this feat was given special honors. However, there was no shame in failing the test. The monk would still advance in rank and be considered a worthy teacher.

Danzan Rabjaa completed his first meditation retreat in Ömnögov, possibly at one of his three monasteries at Gurvan Galbiin Khiid. According to legend, he needed no rest upon completion of his retreat and easily memorized the sixty cartloads of sutras that were read to him. When the time came to prove his skills, he not only lifted the purba with his mind powers, but sent it flying into a nearby cliff. Today locals can point out the marks in the rock wall caused by the flying purba.

"The monks from Khamaryn Khiid sat in the caves for days or weeks at a time. During their meditation they sent blood to circulate in their heads, giving them clarity of thought," explained D. Bold, the curator of the Sainshand History Museum.

He continued, "But few people could pass this challenge. If they died in the caves their bones were left there. These bones added spiritual power to the caves."[1]

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When not meditating, the monks used the caves as a place for philosophical discussions and debates on theories of Buddhism such as emptiness, a topic that writer and Zen teacher Philip Kapleau calls "the dynamic substream of all existence."

Danzan Rabjaa defined emptiness in a poem:

Emptiness is the miracle
Which has no shape,
No direction to go and come,
No color to identify,
No space to exist.[2]

Danzan Rabjaa gives further examples:

> Expectations are empty
> And emotional pain is empty.
> To succeed and to err are attributes of the mind.
> God is the imagination of the mind,
> And Erlig is the imagination of the mind.
> Good and evil come from the mind,
> And all emotions are empty.
> Emptiness is the miracle of being.[3]

Here Rabjaa suggests that the human mind, not anything tangible, is the source of superstition, gods, Erlig, and emotional pain. Therefore, individuals, not an external being, have the power to destroy afflictions that haunt the mind. The poem is also a statement that all things are not inherently real in any ultimate sense.

To take one more example from Rabjaa writings, consider the following poem, which explains that so-called opposites are merely concepts with no real basis.

> White and black are inseparable,
> Good and bad are inseparable,
> Yes and no are inseparable ,
> Above and below are inseparable,
> Fast and slow are inseparable,
> Happiness and suffering are inseparable.
> Everything has an opposite but no reality, just names.[4]

Emptiness also includes visible and seemingly tangible objects, including sunlight. One day Rabjaa asked his students if sunlight was empty. Of course, they said, having never known sunlight to contain solid properties.

Rabjaa then held up a snuff bottle and placed it over a sunbeam that was shining through a hole in the top of the cave. He released the snuff bottle but it seemed to be suspended in mid-air on the beam of light. Here Danzan Rabjaa shows to his students that all of their expectations, thoughts, assumptions and perceptions are empty.

Consider a wall as another example. If Rabjaa substituted the word 'air' for 'wall,' could he push his hand through the wall of the cave? As the story goes, he put his snuff bottle away and proceeded to push his hand into the solid cave wall.

* * *

Danzan Rabjaa may have received substantial education in Buddhism, having been instructed by the most advanced teachers, but according to some European accounts, most Mongol monks and lamas of the nineteenth century had little more than a basic grounding.

The Abbé Huc described his encounter with the lamas of Doloon Nuur:

> The Lamas appeared to us persons of very limited information. . . . When we asked them for some distinct clear, positive idea of what they meant, they were always thrown into utter embarrassment, and stared at one another. The disciples told us that their masters knew all about it; the masters referred us to the omniscience of the Grand Lamas. . . . When we expounded to them the truths of Christianity, they never discussed the matter; they contented themselves with calmly saying, " Well, we don't suppose that our prayers are the only prayers in the world."[5]

Many Western travelers who visited Mongolia before the Communist revolution commented negatively on the state of the monasteries. The accounts of the German traveler Otto Manchen-Helfen, the writings of the Scottish missionary James Gilmour, and even the Russian Przewalski are in the same vein in this respect.

The views of these visitors, most of whom were Christian missionaries, tend to fall in line with the most arrogant beliefs prevalent in 19th century Europe. It is therefore necessary to question the judgments of their observations.

There are no real journalistic accounts of what Danzan Rabjaa's monasteries were like when he was alive. It is probable that life in them was much the same as in the other monasteries in the country. However, there also is no doubt that he drove his monks hard in both scriptural study and the practice of meditation, and strongly encouraged both the arts and social service.

That said, one could also surmise that Rabjaa might have agreed with these travellers and missionaries in some respects, for he was always quick and enthusiastic to offer his criticism of hypocricy, immorality and social injustice wherever he found it. One of his best known poems, entitled "Shame Shame" (*Ichig Ichig*), does just that, and provides us with a humorous condemnation of society at every level. We will see that poem in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Mongolia in the 19th Century

> You kill, kill. And make dried meat.
> You call the living beings the poor ones. Oh World!
> You take and take the humans belongings with deception
> But you have a dislike for gain, oh World!
>
> *Danzan Rabjaa*[1]

Was Danzan Rabjaa speaking about his own society when he wrote these words? Was he reflecting on the injustice of his times?

Mongolia in the nineteenth century was at something of a low point in the nation's 800-year history. The country was riddled by debt, governed by the Manchus, and ruled by a petty aristocracy.

Most records from the 19th century are not neatly classified historical documents. Too much was destroyed by the Communist cultural purges to enable us to gather a complete picture of things, at least at the present time. We have few letters, memoirs or journalisic accounts, since there was no established system to allow for formalized documentation.

Society in 19th century Mongolia was more stratified than it had been in previous generations. Manchu administrators granted titles to strengthen the aristocracy, splitting the country between rich and poor, and creating a divide that they hoped might prevent alliances and rebellion. The lay people were separated into two main classes: the *albutu* (commoner) and the *taij* (nobility).

The taij, wrote the historian Sir Henry Howarth, were not shy in exercising their power.

> The Taidjs or Noyans have a dominant authority over their subjects. They can make or unmake their fortunes. . . .[2]

However, Howarth also noted that princes and ordinary folk were not segregated, despite the existence of distinct classes. He wrote,

> The power of the nobles is implicitly recognized by their dependents and their orders strictly obeyed, and on meeting a noble a peasant will go down on his knees to do him honor," he wrote. "Their intercourse otherwise is, however, perfectly friendly. On rising from their knees the ordinary Mongols will sit down beside their chief, discuss affairs with him, and smoke pipes together.[3]

Danzan Rabjaa does not seem to have put much stock in titles or rank. This is exemplified in a tale about a certain taij who came to Khamaryn Khiid on pilgrimage.

According to the story, Rabjaa was drinking vodka alone one night when the taij entered his ger. There in the tent were two chairs, two silver cups and a full bottle of *arkhi,* which seemed invitation enough for the taij to sit down. The taij had a bright and cheery demeanor, but Rabjaa, who had the power to determine the qualities of a man, saw trickery and deceit in his eyes. He considered this pilgrim unworthy of sharing his drink. Instead he mocked the visitor as a *badarching* (wanderer) and drank incessantly without offering a drop.

The taij finally lost his patience and pleaded for a drink, at which Rabjaa demanded to know on what grounds he should give him his arkhi. "I am from divine lineage and white bones," the taij said. "I have drunk arkhi since I was a child." A Mongol of 'white bones' is a person of high-ranking nobility.

Rabjaa, showing no respect to the class of the man before him, replied, "You may be of white bones, but I am a donkey, that is why I drink arkhi as if it were water. So go to your place of high aristocrats, drink your arkhi and feast." He waved the pilgrim out of his tent.

The story is a favorite in Mongolia as it again shows Rabjaa's disregard for the wealthy and the upper classes; it also a good example of his stubborn and bull-headed personality, not to mention his love of drink.

The story also states that Rabjaa could drink arkhi as if it were water, which indicates his yogic ability to drink as much as he liked without truly becoming intoxicated, a well-known ability of tantric masters. It was these traits that elevated Rabjaa into a special place in dismal 19th century Mongolia; at a time of despair, here was a man who broke all the rules and gave his followers some sense of self-respect.

It seems certain that nineteenth century Mongolia suffered considerably from poverty. Most of the country's money was in the hands of Manchu usurers, who maintained high interest rates on their loans and dominated the economy to their own advantage. In effect, the entire country was mortgaged to the Manchus for 200 years.

Poverty increased during Danzan Rabjaa's lifetime, and in 1816 Tushet Khan Aimag was home to 13,666 people living in debt. That number rose to 17,752 by 1837.[4]

Most Mongols today blame the Manchus for reducing them to financial ruin during that period of their history. However, it is possible that the Mongols themselves walked openly into the situation.

The Abbé Huc recorded his observations of trade between the Chinese and Mongols in the 1840s:

> The commercial intercourse between the Tartars and the Chinese is revoltingly iniquitous on the part of the latter. So soon as Mongols, simple, ingenuous men, if such there be at all in the world, arrive in a trading town, where they are snapped up by some Chinese, who carry them off... to their houses, give them tea for themselves and forage for their animals, and cajole them in every conceivable way. The Mongols, themselves without guile and incapable of conceiving guile in others, take all they hear to be perfectly genuine, and congratulate themselves, conspicuous as they are of their inaptitude for business, upon their good fortune in thus meeting with brothers, *ahatou,* as they say, in whom they can place full confidence and who will undertake to manage their whole business for them...
>
> When once the Chinese has got hold of the Tartar, he employs upon him all the resources of the skilful and utterly unprincipled knavery of the Chinese character. He keeps them in his house, eating and drinking and smoking, one day after another, until his subordinates have sold all the poor man's cattle, or whatever else he has to sell, and brought for him the commodities he requires, at prices double and triple the market value.[5]

Dependence grew on the Manchus not only for banking but also for the production of goods. Even the simplest items like metal pots, cloth, saddles and needles had to be imported or made in Manchu-owned shops. Debtors were often subject to a beating for failing to pay off a loan. Floggings and jail were commonplace Manchu banking habits.

It was this harsh treatment under Manchu rule that left leaders such as Danzan Rabjaa in utter dismay. In adulthood he found an outlet for his frustrations in his dramatic poetry, plays and operas.

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Rabjaa took great delight in criticizing inequities wherever he encountered them. One of the most popular poems in which he does this is entitled "Shame Shame."

The poem is loved by Mongols for how it holds back nothing and avoids no targets in its swings. He even ends by criticizing himself.

Oh elders who did not give in charity, shame.
Oh youth, dandified but not purified in soul, shame.
Oh intelligent people who lack devotion to learning, shame.
Oh nobles who discriminate against your subjects, shame.
Oh girls who tend to lovers but abandon parents, shame.
Oh statesmen who abuse your power, shame.
Oh pupils who do not learn from books but learn instead
  from things rotten, shame.
Oh monks lacking meditation but shouting for comfort, shame.
Oh lamas sitting in a monastery by day but wandering
  with families by night, shame.
Oh disciples of impeccable devotion from the outside, but
  secretly cheaters inside, shame.
Oh physicians who accept money for no treatment, shame.
Oh wary people who can't see your own faults, but find
  faults in others, shame.
Oh girls whose eyes pretend to be looking at the face, but
  whose soul wanders around one's back, shame.
Oh teachers who preach morality during the day but
  become lax at night, shame.
Oh husbands who visit other women but question your own
  wives, shame.
Oh wives not heeding your husbands, and becoming intimate
  with other men, shame.
Oh, if these negative actions are found in me,
Then I stand alone in public in shame.
Oh, if these faults are found in others, no matter their position,
They are also shame and shame.
Ah, no need for desperation. But what a pity.
Oh, my poem is over.[4]

Chapter Six:
A Desert Theater

> Above a minimum level of sophistication, cultural development is bound to depend on a certain stability of life. . . . The Mongols were never averse to the theater, but amongst the herdsmen themselves dramatic performances never seem to have grown much beyond the size of what they themselves call the 'conversation song'... There were no costumes, no make-up and no action beyond the movement of the head and eyes.
>
> *Charles Bawden*[1]

Opera was almost unheard of in early 19th century Outer Mongolia, largely due to its remoteness from large metropolitan cultural centers, its scattered population, and the Manchu isolationist policies. Danzan Rabjaa would introduce and popularize it.

As Bawden suggests, would-be actors occasionally put on a one-man-show inside a ger. These performances included epic poems, overtone singing (*khöömii*) and other songs. The usual topic of these songs was the beauty of a woman, the strength of a horse, the immensity of the landscape, the great love of a prince for a poor shepherd girl, or maybe the illicit love of a lama for a young beauty.

Some of these bards worked on a semi-professional basis, traveling across the steppes to perform their show, as Danzan Rabjaa's father had done. Przewalski made comments on his observations of small theater and music:

> Their songs are always plaintive and relate to their past lives and exploits. They usually sing on a caravan journey, and occasionally in the yurta, but the women's voices are not heard so often as the men's. Troubadours or wander-

> ing minstrels always secure an appreciative audience. Their musical instruments are the flute and guitar; we never saw them dance, and they are probably unskilled in the art.[2]

The epic songs (called *Baatarlag Tuul,* or "heroic epic") could go on for hours or even days. They generally contained messages of prophecy, describing the future 'war of Shambhala,' and the destruction of evil. The epic songs were consistent with traditional Mongolian verse, using vowel harmony, formal parallelism, and initial line alliteration. Generally, there were no prose passages, but some less able bards would resort to summarizing in prose the passages they couldn't remember in verse form.[3]

The epic songs and other verse forms were usually sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments such as the violin, fiddle or zither. The Mongol fiddle is called *morin khuur* (horsehead fiddle), named after its use of horsehair strings and unique carving (the upper portion is shaped like a horse head). The Scottish missionary James Gilmour called the Mongol fiddles "rude and primitive," but said its sound was "soft and low and pleasing in the extreme."

Gilmour describes in his book a song about a young girl, sung to him by a lama with the accompaniment of a fiddle.

> The burden of the song was the praises of a maiden. . . and the words are supposed to proceed from the mouth of a disappointed suitor who is stricken with grief, when the girl finally mounts her horse and rides off in a procession to be the wife of a more fortunate rival.
>
> The plan of the song is truly Mongolian. The various birds singing on the temple roof, twittering on the plain, and floating on the lakes, are each asked in turn, and in separate verses, if they have seen the marriage procession of the dear, the beautiful, the friendly Pinglang pass along. Even the rainbow, the five-colored and nine-colored rainbow is interrogated. The procession itself is described in a series of verses, the burden and refrain of each of which is that the little Pingling is conspicuous as she rides along solitary in the center. The song also enlarges on her beauties and graces. Her skin is like cotton or snow, her breath is like musk, even her perspiration is minutely characterized in a manner which to Mongols may be eulogistic, but which would seem ridiculous to foreign ears.

> It was a little difficult to start the singers in this song, but it was more difficult to stop them. Different versions seem to have different numbers of verses, and it was not till a long list of them had been slowly gone through, that an opportunity could be found to terminate the performance by praising its merits.[4]

While such performances were staged inside the ger, outdoor theater was limited. Manchu colonization in the 18th century meant the development of theater groups in the settlements at Khovd, Uliastai and Khuree, but these were geared to Manchu audiences and probably were not introduced to the greater Mongol public. There was, however, a theater production in western Mongolia called the "History of Daughter Manubari."

Rather than sitting through the Manchu-inspired productions, most Mongols preferred to watch religious dance performances called *tsam* (sometimes *cham*), which Rabjaa studied in Alasha and Chahar, and sporadically offered for the patrons of his own temples.

Tsam dance may have developed first in India, but its real origins came from pre-Buddhist Tibet, during the time when the animistic religion Bön was practiced. The priest or shaman, dressed in an elaborate costume and dancing to the beat of a drum, would embody animals or spirits while in his trance. Over time, the shamans' dance evolved into an actual form of entertainment, with the audience expecting both a religious experience and theatrical enjoyment. Thus, one aspect of dramatic theater in Central Asia was formed.

The Duinkhor quarter of Khamaryn Khiid was built specifically as a 'Tsam Theater.' (It was later expanded to include more diverse forms of theater). Rabjaa assembled a skilled orchestra to accompany the tsam dances. There were no fewer than 24 instruments divided into four classes: wind, percussion, stringed and rattle.[5]

Part of the Shamanic ceremony included sacrificial offerings. These however, became unfashionable when Tibet adopted Buddhism after the 8th century. Padmasambhava, an Indian Tantric teacher, was the first to substitute the Bön characters with Buddhist ones; and the bloody sacrifices were replaced with symbolic gestures (like the tearing apart of a manikin instead of a living creature). This agreed with Buddhist monks who found the sacrifice of animals abhorrent. As the centuries passed, story lines were developed, characters added and plots refined. Each region adapted the dance to reflect its own myths and beliefs, but it was the larger monasteries of Tibet that standardized the dance into the tsam that we recognize today.

Typically the dance is held in the main courtyard of the monastery, on a stage called the *tsam-ra*. After the nobility and common people have taken their seats, the musicians begin to play and the first dancers appear on stage wearing wide-brimmed black hats topped with replicated human skulls. This costume is believed to represent the clothing worn by Palgye Dorje, the Tibetan monk who assassinated the fanatic anti-Buddhist King Langdarma in the 9th century. Tibetans and Mongols would have been familiar with the plot for this story.

The story begins by describing the despotic rule of King Langdarma. A truly wicked man, he has spent his ruling life purging his people, his opponents and the monasteries of his kingdom. In response, the heroic Palgye Dorje devises a plot to topple the king. First he blackens his white horse with coal dust, then slips a bow and arrow into his long coat sleeves, then finally rides into Lhasa disguised as a Bön magician. Palgye Dorje gains an audience with the king and begins a special dance, watched by the king and his noblemen. The king becomes entranced and is drawn near; giving the monk an opportunity to shoot him with the poison-tipped arrow. The king perishes and the monk slips unnoticed out of the city. After changing back into his monks' robes, he crosses the river. It is now that the audience sees Palgye Dorje's craftiness, as his horse wades through the waters the coal dust is washed away and the horse becomes white once again. When the king's cavalry catches up to the disguised Palgye Dorje, they ask, "Have you seen a magician riding a black pony?" The monk points them in the wrong direction, makes his safe escape, and Buddhism is saved.

The tsam dance was a common feature for Danzan Rabjaa's troupe. Danzan Rabjaa himself made occasional appearances in his own tsam performances; in 1830 Rabjaa performed in a tsam developed by the Third Panchen Lama (1737-1780), which focused on the war of Shambhala and destruction of the unfaithful.

Besides tsam, Rabjaa also had his performers re-enact a stage drama of the story of Palgye Dorje and King Langdarma. Interviews conducted in 1960 by the researcher Damdinsuren show that this drama was also directed by the Seventh Noyon Khutagt in the early 20th century (although some of the names had been changed).

"The actor playing the role of Langdarma killed many monks with his sword," said Yondon, one of the men interviewed by Damdinsuren.

"Palgye Dorje then shot the king with his arrow and Langdarma fell over. When Palgye Dorje crossed the river his horse changed color." [6]

In the tsam dance, the first dancers are followed by ghoulish characters, each with terrifying, demonic masks and skull necklaces. The cast includes deformed animals, evil spirits, skeletons, Indian yogis and the Chokyi Gyalpo, a bull-headed religious king who slays the Lord of the Dead. This creature performs the ritual sacrifice by dismembering a corpse and scattering the limbs. Because these scenes are meant to instill fear, some comic moments are added to ease the audience's mind. In Mongolia, an old man with a long white beard played the comic role. The old man, named Tserendug, had been part of the pantheon of shamanic gods, a symbol of fertility for both people and livestock, and was brought into the Buddhist realm by lamas who recognized his popularity.

The tsam dance, which can last up to three days, is designed to crush evil spirits before the New Year begins. By the end of the performance, the protectors have subdued all the enemies of Buddhism, and thus the fear of demons is eliminated. Tsam dances were fairly consistent in Mongolia and Tibet, but Danzan Rabjaa toyed with the dance, altering its rules and strict conformity. First he de-emphasized the importance of Tserendug and increased the importance of female characters, actually making the old man subservient to his female protector-deity. In one scene, the female protector orders Tserendug to milk a cow. However, because his eyesight is poor, he mistakenly milks an elephant. His reaction upon realizing this was a humiliating moment for Tserendug and comic relief for Rabjaa's audience.

Rabjaa also recognized the value of the human face. While masks were still used for some performances, Rabjaa had some of his actors play their parts without a mask, reasoning that their facial expressions could be just as important as their dance movements. According to one legendary tale, a certain dancer named Barmasi sat backstage, fraught at having misplaced his mask. Thinking the angered expression borne on his face even more shocking than the mask itself, Rabjaa tied a *galin* (bone trumpet) into his hair and pushed him on-stage to terrify the audience with his maniacal appearance.

"Playing the tsam without a mask became the fundamental tool for Mongolian theater," explains museum curator D. Bold, himself a former actor. "Facial expressions became important and this shifted stage entertainment away from dance to real acting." [7]

There were other performing arts that certainly had great influence on Rabjaa. One must have been the singing play in which two minstrels would perform a duet, exchanging verses to provide some moral for the audience. The following example, called *Galuu Khun Khoër*, written by Rabjaa, is a dialogue between a man and a goose. Together they discuss obligation and responsibility. The use of the bird shows the migrating, or transitory nature of affections. The man, who tries to explain the impossibility of avoiding one's obligation, begins the conversation:

Goose, you came from the south.
Goose, you spend your summer in the high Khangai.
Goose, you sing on the wide water.
Will you stay here forever?

And the bird responds:
Even when there were no clouds there was rain,
And even if no one lit anything there was smoke.
And when one looked up there were rocks
And what one did oneself was an obligation.

And the man responds:
Your rain without clouds is called hail.
Your smoke without lightning is called fog.
The rocks that you saw are called ice,
And what you did yourself is called karma.

The bird then comments:
Person who works for the government,
Person who has experienced peace and happiness,
Person who has unbeatable skill,
Are you staying here long?

Then the man answers:
I received things that I gave away before,
I became blind though I used to see,
I felt cold in the winter,
I became poor having property.

Previous good karma is returning things I gave away.
Seeing death, but not knowing it, is being blind.
Winter months are old age.
No property is the next life's soul.

The goose now asks:
How to protect from the rain without clouds?
How to dispel the fog that wasn't generated?
With what can the rock be destroyed?
How to fulfill my duty?

The man says:
Feathers can protect from the rain without clouds.
By flight, fog without generation can be avoided.
I would fly to the warm land from the ice that I have seen.
I will make my karma lighter by experiencing results of karma.
By the story of this goose and man
I have set a wonderful example.
For ignorant people it is a joke.
For a lonely person it is entertainment.[8]

The duet, performed on-stage before an audience, advanced beyond the normal theater-yurt performance, but it was still a far cry from modern drama. Moving closer in this direction was the Buddhist morality play called *ace lhamo*. A 15th century Tibetan bridge builder and holy man named Thang Tong Gyalpo is credited for developing this type of theater acting, having taken the tsam dance and given it dialogue.

According to the story, a Tibetan work crew came to Thang Tong Gyalpo seeking advice. They complained that the bridge they were building by day was being disassembled by demons during the night. In order to distract the demons, he advised them to stage a play each evening. In this manner, they completed their bridge. Their play was the first ace lhamo performance.

The ace lhamo can be based on legendary or historical characters and the plots are borrowed from folktales and Buddhist canonical literature. The theatrical aspects were borrowed from India and actors are usually decked out in elaborate costumes and masks. Masks that portray animals cover the entire head while witches, devils, demons and evil foreigners wear a three-dimensional face mask. Female characters wear a flat teardrop shaped mask and the male heroes wear no mask at all. The script dialogue is stylized, and is done in a singsong voice called *namtar*.

The performances, which can last a day or more, are played by a troupe that can include both monks and laypeople. At one time these troupes traveled to different temples and monasteries, bringing all their props and costumes with them. It was not only an effective way to spread Buddhist messages but also a means of employment and fund-raising. Danzan Rabjaa also set up a sort of traveling carnival called *Amaagiin Gandoi Erkh* to worship the deity Yanchin. His dancers (usually female) would visit local families, invite them to the festivities and then introduce them to his spiritual messages, while at the same time gathering up donations and gifts.

While the ace lhamo typically shows how Buddhism can defeat evil and bring happiness to the pious, some plays, including *Dalog Nangsa*, are more secular. This play describes a woman who had seen the world after death. *Dalog* means 'to return from beyond,' and is applied to people who have traveled to the afterlife. This idea stems from Tibet's Shamanic roots when souls journeyed between the worlds. According to the play, a virtuous woman called Nangsa is wrongly accused of adultery and is beaten to death by a vengeful sister-in-law. Nangsa must then face Shinje (the Lord of Death). This Erlig-type figure interrogates and then acquits her when he feels she has been unjustly murdered. Shinje allows Nangsa to return to life, but once home she is again mistreated by her friends and relatives. Escaping their cruel punishment she joins a nunnery. In the end, Nangsa flies from the roof of the convent and disappears into a rainbow.

In similar, non-secular fashion, there is the popular Mongolian story *Journey To Hell* about a noble woman named Choidshid. While fighting a terrible sickness she dreams about her descent to the underworld where she confronts Erlig. It is decided that Choidshid is not ready to die and she is ordered back to life. But before returning to the upper world Choidshid witnesses the long lines of people from all classes awaiting judgment. The good and bad deeds of each are read aloud and the dead are condemned to the appropriate hell. When she has returned to earth, she tells of her experience and persuades her followers to lead a virtuous life or be subjected to punishment after death. It was this short play and others like it, which Rabjaa used as a vignette between his main theater performances.[9]

Elements of tsam, morality plays and song duets can be found in Danzan Rabjaa's most famous play, *Saran Khökhöö Namtar (The Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo)*. He wrote the libretto in 1827-1828 (some sources say 1830-1831) in the quiet isolation of Khar Uul (Black Mountains), not far from Khamaryn Khiid. The story is based on a novel written in 1737 by a Tibetan writer named 'Madi' (whose given name was Dagfu Luvson Dambi Jaltsen). A 71-year old Inner Mongolian monk, Dai

Guosh Vangindara Shasna Varda (otherwise known as Agvanlampil), translated the play into Mongolian in 1770. Prior to the 20th century, at least one copy is known to have ended up as far away as Siberia. Danzan Rabjaa was probably first exposed to *Saran Khökhöö* in Alasha. Despite being of Tibetan origin, Rabjaa's nine-act version was adapted for a Mongolian audience, including Mongolian games, sports, traditions and social life, covering a 20-year period of time in the 19th century. *Saran Khökhöö* was usually shown in one day, but there were other versions that could take one week, two weeks or a 12-volume version that lasted an entire month (June 15 until July 15). The longer versions included three separate performances based on textual biographies of Milarepa, Atisha and the historical Buddha. The story of Palgye Dorje and King Langdarma was also added, leading many viewers into the mistaken belief that King Langdarma was actually part of the *Saran Khökhöö Namtar.*

Putting on a full theatrical performance in 19th century Mongolia was no easy task. There were no drama groups, no playhouses, no costumes, nor any history of organized theater at all. Working from scratch, Rabjaa wrote scripts, choreographed dance routines, composed music, trained actors and built stages. *Saran Khökhöö* required over 200 musicians, actors and assistants whom Rabjaa drew from all walks of life: young, old, rich, poor, lamas and lay people. All performed in the plays.

One difference between this opera and the Tibetan ace lhamo was that Danzan Rabjaa's characters usually did not wear masks. They used make-up, a technique probably borrowed from Chinese opera. It seems that community leaders (when they acted in Rabjaa's plays) were allowed to wear masks to disguise their identity. There was concern that the unsophisticated audience would mock a wealthy aristocrat for playing the role of a poor person. In some cases, Rabjaa may have used animal masks to differentiate good and bad characters: monkey, tiger, donkey, pig and cow heads were villains while cuckoo, human and horse heads were heroes.

The opera was first rehearsed by Danzan Rabjaa and his disciples in Alasha and the Khar Uul Mountains, and later taken to urban centers in Inner Mongolia, where Rabjaa used it to raise funds for his monastery and theater projects. Monastery courtyards served as the main venues, the same stages used by the Tibetan tsam performers. In Outer Mongolia, Rabjaa went one step further and built three special purpose theaters.

The first theater was a simple tent structure pitched at the foot of a mountain in the Khar Uul range. The second theater was constructed in Süm Khökh Burd in Dundgov, set upon the ruins of an old temple. The original construction here dated from the 10th century. Later, a small nobleman's home was erected in the 17th century. Danzan Rabjaa's stage was built over the fallen masonry.

The largest theater was adjacent to Khamaryn Khiid. The impressive structure was commissioned in 1831 and Rabjaa sent his disciples to Khuree to purchase wood for its construction; work began in 1832 and took two full years to complete, during which time Rabjaa trained his actors (*khurigchid*) in Alasha.

The three-story building was positioned close to the monastery complex; the stone foundations are still visible in the ground. The main action was on the first platform, which featured a trap door, stage exits on both sides and well-placed mirrors that could be used for exchanging signals. Off to the sides were the dressing rooms and make-up rooms. Comic intermissions were staged on the second tier. Sometimes two scenes were shown simultaneously, the first floor representing the earth and the second floor, the sky or heaven. This was useful because many Buddhist dramas had alternating scenes between heaven and earth, heaven and hell, or earth and hell. Gombo, a former resident lama at Khamaryn Khiid, tells how the multi-level stage was also used to show class distinction: "The lords feasted on the top floor while the slaves spoke of all things from the lower floor. Some slaves said their master was a good man like the Buddha while others said their master was evil-minded like the Devil."[10]

A director's box was located on the third floor. Several observers, including Danzan Rabjaa, could sit here and oversee the opera below. Signals and directions could be given using mirrors. One of his assistants held a short wooden staff with pieces of silk and cloth tied to one end; this device was used to flog actors who made mistakes. The 64-member orchestra – filled with string, wind and percussion instruments – sat hidden behind the main stage. Towards the back, and on each side, were rooms for the 30-odd crew members who organized costumes and stage design.

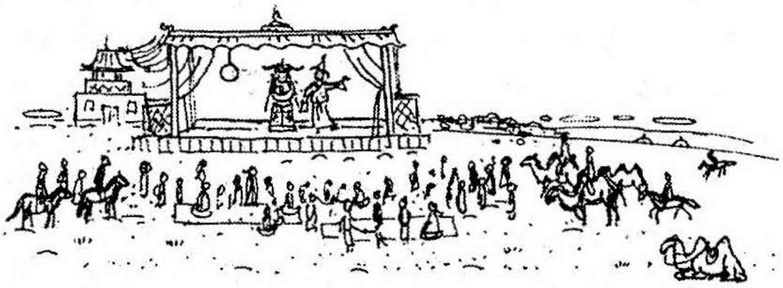
The historian Dogmid wrote, "The acoustics were so good that men seated on their camels in the back row could hear the actors perfectly."[11] Baatar, a senior lama at Khamaryn Khiid, describes a sort of 'magical wind' that could carry the actor's voices out to the audience, but prevented the spectators' chatter from reaching the stage. A more reasonable explanation is that the architects wisely positioned the building so the prevailing winds swept towards the audience, carrying voices and music with it.

Whole teams were involved in pre-production costume design, props and make-up. Others were assigned as music and acting instructors. Costumes for the opera were elaborate and heavy - large silk gowns with oversized sleeves and cuffs, weighed down by semi-precious stones and shiny metallic objects. Some examples of these costumes are on display at the Danzanravjaa Museum, including the small, knee-high boots worn by the young actor who played the part of the cuckoo. Yellow in color, they feature upturned toes of the traditional Mongol boot with a cuckoo's head at the tip, as well as an embroidered image of the cuckoo bird at the top, covering the calf. Face make-up was produced in Mongolia from clarified yak butter, grease and paint made from various crushed stones. The different colors symbolized emotion; red, for example, represented courage while white was indicative of cunning.

Special effects were another main feature of the theater at Khamaryn Khiid. Rabjaa was renowned for mystifying his audience with simulated weather. First came the roll of thunder using drums made with stretched leather skins, then the crack of lighting with the help of Chinese firecrackers. The back stage doors were opened to allow in a funnel of wind. Then came the pitter-patter of rain when rice or seeds were dropped from the second floor and onto the stage.

As mentioned earlier, the monk Yondon, living in the early twentieth century, recalled seeing the curious effect of Palgye Dorje's horse change color after crossing the river in the tsam dance. Yondon also remembered equally dramatic battle scenes directed by the Seventh Noyon Khutagt. Lasting two or three days, these war epics included the use of a cavalry. Twenty or thirty horsemen could ride across the stage on mock horses behind a curtain that hid their legs but revealed the horses' head and rear. The fighting, he said, included swords dipped in red paint that was splattered about like so much blood.[12]

Saran Khökhöö itself is extraordinarily complex, made more so by numerous tangent scenes that break off to describe social life and religion in Mongolia. It has long received mixed reviews, as its earliest critics, the Manchus, were disturbed with what they felt was an anti-imperialistic attempt to undermine their power. A disapproving Manchurian regent once ordered Rabjaa's theater burnt to the ground, but was narrowly dissuaded by the monks of Khamaryn Khiid. On the other side of the spectrum, researcher Walther Heissig, who found part of the story in Beijing, called Saran Khökhöö "an astonishingly compact and thrilling story, if one overlooks the didactic passages."[13]



Monastic courtyard performance of Rabjaa's The Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo

Heissig was, perhaps, so aroused because *The Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo* was quite unlike the typical 18th century Asian tale. This was an era when high-minded Buddhist stories were fashionable, spurred by the hierarchy's long-lasting fight to crush superstition and paganism. Saran Khökhöö, especially the Mongolian version, read like a real life drama and was uniquely adventurous, and, although it carried Buddhist morals, its focus and uniqueness was on humanity.

The play looks into social conflicts, the distinction between good and evil, wisdom and dullness, the rich and poor. It examines how these different values interact to form the world in which Danzan Rabjaa lived. The major theme shows how blackmail and sin are unscrupulously used for ruling class power grabs, but the story does not outwardly seek to sway the opinion of the audience. Rather, it presents itself in a way that allows the public to judge the characters for themselves. It was this aspect that was uniquely Rabjaa, and uniquely Mongolian.

The story begins with a description of King Mashuka, whose wife gives birth to a beautiful girl, on whose cheek is the vague outline of a chrysanthemum and whose whole body bears the scent of this flower. A lama announces that the child is a special reincarnation and her father bestows upon her a religious name, Madmakhya. King Odibisha, who rules a neighboring kingdom, visits this marvelous child and word spreads of her beauty. Soon all the kings come to Mashuka's palace and a sacrificial ritual is held to honor the exalted child.

Years later, Madmakhya is a grown woman and indeed very beautiful. Countless princes and kings arrive at the palace to ask for her hand in marriage, but Mashuka cannot decide among them. So he instructs the courtiers to dress in their finest clothes and Madmakhya will decide for herself by tossing one of them a flower rosary. When they line up, the court believes she will send her rosary towards one of two very powerful and wealthy kings. Instead she throws it to an unknown prince in a white (*tsagaan*) *del* named Guleranz. This attire brought him the nickname 'Tsagaan Del.' When her father asks why she had thrown it to this prince of mediocre wealth, she answers that money and looks are not her priority. Knowledge is more important and she is confident Guleranz is the right man to take for her husband.

Together the wise king and queen live and rule in Varanasi, India. They are a popular and well-respected royal couple, and they enjoy all of life's pleasures, with the exception of a child. So they pray to their protector deities, and ten months later Madmakhya gives birth to a beautiful boy who they name Nomun-Bayasgalant.

Other important characters introduced here are the two Brahmins named Garma-Öd and Suzaa. Add to the list Guleranz's trusted Minister Yamshe, a two-faced character who appears kindly but is actually cold-hearted and wicked.

Yamshe has a son named Laganaa and very much wants his boy to follow in his footsteps. He suggests to Guleranz that Laganaa befriend Nomun-Bayasgalant so they can start a relationship of prince and servant. This intrigue is told as follows in the script:

> The high minister thought, aye! I have been friends with King Guleranz since our youth, thus he loves me very much. Even today though I am old I have much power over him. If my son does not befriend Nomun-Bayasgalant from an early age he will never reach a high status. Even today I have the power to run the country and as long as I am alive I must take the opportunity to assist my son. Thus the king's little one must give the might to that boy. He must take him to be the bearer of honors and when he takes my son as a friend, this one (my boy) will always get land in great style.[14]

Guleranz says he will take the matter up with his wife. But Yamshe, who fears Madmakhya, tells Guleranz that "*Real* kings do not consult with their wives." Somehow Madmakhya learns of Yamshe's plot, and she is immediately against the friendship. She instinctively does not trust the minister, but pride forces Guleranz to reject her demands that Yamshe be dismissed. "*Real* kings do not listen to their wives," he says.

Three wise men also appear and are likewise against the friendship of Laganaa and Nomun-Bayasgalant. They go to the king's chamber to warn Guleranz, but are betrayed by spies deployed by Yamshe. The minister conjures up a story that the wise men plotted to assassinate the king and manages to have them banished from Varanasi. Before expulsion they announce that "Life is now hard but the times to come will be more difficult." In this way, Yamshe is able to secure the friendship between Nomun-Bayasgalant and Laganaa.

The two boys study and play together, and for some time life in Varanasi is peaceful. One day Nomun-Bayasgalant hears about a powerful Brahmin named Taruba, and he asks Laganaa to visit this wise man. Laganaa agrees and during the meeting it is revealed that this Brahmin has the power to animate dead bodies. Laganaa reports his discovery to Nomun-Bayasgalant, and the two go together to the Brahmin to learn how to animate dead creatures. Soon they are both skilled in this art.

As Nomun-Bayasgalant grows up he considers that he should leave the palace, shed his rich silk clothing and become a monk. This is a typical aspect of Buddhist stories, which reflects Siddhartha's intention to do the same. Guleranz objects on the grounds that the prince should be married, have children and keep the royal line intact. He forbids Nomun-Bayasgalant from going into the monastic life and marries him to a beautiful, wise and kind-hearted woman from middle India named Sersnaa.[15] Being a pragmatic woman she does not object to her husband's interest in Buddhism. Rather, she suggests that they study the faith together.

Sersnaa and Nomun-Bayasgalant are very fond of each other, and their relationship disgusts the second of his five wives. The second is an evil and jealous character called Sersadanii.[16] In order to destroy this relationship and fulfill her dreams of becoming the primary queen, Sersadanii befriends Laganaa.

At first the young minister resists the plans of this lovely temptress. He says it would be quite impossible for him to betray Nomun-

Bayasgalant. But he eventually concedes to her wishes and agrees to think of some plot by which he can overthrow the prince.

One day Laganaa suggests to Nomun-Bayasgalant that ministers of the court visit a lovely garden on the outskirts of Varanasi, to which the prince agrees. Before leaving, Laganaa takes two dead cuckoo birds with him. After seeing the garden, Laganaa suggests to the prince that they walk to a beautiful wide river, which is not far away. Upon reaching the riverbank, Laganaa says that across the river is a secret forest that they should explore. The prince suggests that they borrow a boat from his father and cross the river. The cunning Laganaa says Guleranz would not give permission to take a boat, but he has another idea. The young minister reveals the two dead cuckoos and suggests they animate them and fly across the river to secretly explore the forest.

Overcome by curiosity, Nomun-Bayasgalant agrees to the plan and the two friends leave their human forms and enter the cuckoos' bodies. They fly over the river and into the forest, and are immediately overwhelmed by its tempting fruit and rare flowers. But while Nomun-Bayasgalant is lost in this wonderland and enjoying the singing birds, the underhanded Laganaa flies back across the river to the bank where the inanimate bodies still lie. He leaves the cuckoo body and takes the flesh of Nomun-Bayasgalant. Then he throws the cuckoo corpse and his own inanimate body into the river. Laganaa, now with the prince's body, returns to the palace entourage, crying that his "dear friend Laganaa" has fallen into the river and drowned. All the courtiers lament this tragic incident and mourn for "dead" Laganaa.

Everyone returns to the palace to mourn the loss, but Sersnaa, the principle wife, has her doubts as the days pass. Her husband still looks like Nomun-Bayasgalant, but is now a changed man, having no interest in Buddhism or prayer. She soon finds the prince repulsive, and is even more disgusted when he begins giving special attention to the wicked concubine Sersadanii. It isn't long before Sersnaa is banished from the palace and has no choice but to live an ordinary life as a penniless peasant outside the castle walls.

Meanwhile, the real Nomun-Bayasgalant is still in the glen across the river, fluttering about in his cuckoo body. He is worried for his feathered friend Laganaa who has gone missing, when the Buddha appears before him and explains what has happened. The sympathetic Buddha also turns into a cuckoo to keep the saddened prince company and tells Nomun-Bayasgalant that his fate is to remain in the forest with the other animals.

Hence the sad prince remains in his feathered form and lives amongst the birds, teaching them Buddhism and magic. 19th century Mongolian audiences would certainly be able to connect this with the legend of the Buddha preaching to the birds (which occur in some of the "Jataka Tales" of his previous lives). They may also have associated the bird with Danzan Rabjaa, who was himself an outcast of Manchu authority, preaching his good words to those with an ear to listen.

Back at the palace, servants and attendants are concerned over the dire state of affairs among the royal family members. 'Nomun-Bayasgalant' becomes very cruel, punishing his subjects without cause, confiscating their property and greedily reveling in his wealth. He no longer helps beggars, and instead suppresses Buddhism and education. Beauty, it appears, is only 'skin deep' and the court can no longer trust their prince. The lines of one villager:

> We were mistaken in our thoughts that we lived under an educated king and that our happiness was never-ending. Now we have no time for happiness. This month is worse than the previous month and this year is worse than the past year. These days a man with beautiful daughters is more important than the clever man. And drunken youths are better than old honest clerks. Killing and robbery is more common than religious activities and the good system of the old times is destroyed.[17]

Sersnaa is the first to recognize that this evil prince cannot be her husband. She writes a letter describing her suspicions, leaves it on the palace door, and flees to her homeland. While traveling home, she meets the three banished wise men that had faithfully served Guleranz. They understand the problem in their kingdom and are determined to return home and restore order. After their long journey the wise men ride around the village outside the palace and announce that Nomun-Bayasgalant is not really who he appears to be. Realizing that the scheme is unwinding, Laganaa's father Yamshe commits suicide, and his mother dies of grief. Laganaa, still in the form of Nomun-Bayasgalant, flees the palace and is never seen again.

But the blue-throated cuckoo-prince can do nothing more than perch on the windowsill of his castle. According to what the Buddha in the forest had predicted, a famous lama who preaches long-winded Buddhist sermons meets the cuckoo and explains how all the preceding events were connected to the spiritual world. For example, the bad karma associated with Nomun-Bayasgalant and Laganaa is connected to a past life when they had been neighboring kings who had warred with each other.

The cuckoo eventually dies of a broken heart and Nomun-Bayasgalant is found in the bird's body. In the end, he is buried underneath an evergreen tree while flowers rain down from the sky. For years to come the tree is worshiped by the people of Varanasi.[18]

There are two primary elements at work in this opera. The first is Rabjaa's use of the play to show important elements of Buddhist thought and philosophy. *Saran Khökhöö* showed people how to live righteous lives according to the Buddha's teachings, and if these teachings were ignored they could expect karmic retribution. In the case of Laganaa and Nomun-Bayasgalant, bad karma from a previous lifetime taught them both painful lessons. Tantric ideas also occur throughout, notably with the recognition of feminine knowledge as an important source of power, as well as secret spells, such as the ability of the two boys to animate the dead.

The second important element of the opera is Rabjaa's surreptitious attempts at political satire. As a social critic, the director designed the play so that it devalued the petty aristocracy. Greedy noblemen, oppressive Manchurian officials and illegitimate rule are displayed through Yamshe's and Sersadanii's intense desire for power. The two ultimately ruin the kingdom with their personal ambitions. Danzan Rabjaa shows that this is not an historical play, but rather a story told about the present. In the original libretto we can find phrases like, "When bad times come," which Rabjaa changed to read, "In these bad times," showing a desire to criticize contemporary society. The play becomes even more personal when it becomes clear that the director is using characters to display his own emotions. Rabjaa, for example, was surely expressing his own thoughts about contemporary society when King Mashuka said:

> Most of the people look at the colors, not at the quality
> Sick for beauty, not for kindness
> Look for benefit, not for good behavior
> People want fame rather than good thoughts
> They don't have good conduct, just false words
> So it is a bad time[19]

Mongolian Professor Tsagaan summed up this expressive mood when she wrote, "Even though he is a representative of the highest class, he can still criticize his contemporaries. He said if the government acts badly then ordinary people will suffer. The drama is clear proof that he was progressive and loved his country and people, He expressed all his critical ideas through this drama."[20]

The play accomplished more than the teaching of lessons; it also promoted Mongolian culture in the face of encroaching Chinese influence. Rabjaa, fearing that the Mongols would be sinocized by their southern neighbors, did justice to Mongolian social life and leisure activities. He emphasized the importance of classical Mongolian sporting events like horse racing, archery, and wrestling. He also incorporated ancient customs: for example, when Prince Nomun-Bayasgalant is born, his parents give a piece of white felt to a fortuneteller. The seer was able to look into this felt and see Nomun-Bayasgalant's future. He fearfully describes a tortured life of sadness and heartache. For centuries, Mongolian fortunetellers have used the same method for predicting the future of newborn babies.

The flowery and descriptive language Rabjaa uses in the play is common of Mongolian classic literature. The following extract, a dialogue between the dying King Mashuka and his daughter Madmakhya, exemplifies the language used:

Oh daughter, you listen!
Leaves are not always on trees.
Children are not always together with their parents.
The dragon's call will become empty though its roar is loud.
The world's triumph will pass away though its glory is great.
Colorful rainbows will disappear though they are beautiful.
Lovely young bodies will grow old though they are now young.
Thousands of millions of dreams are empty when you wake up.
Every act of this naïve life is false at the time of death.
Night comes when the sun sets.
Death comes when age ends.

Death - a strong-winged bird can't escape from it.
There is no shelter from death.
There is no wise word to fight with death.
There is no trick for death.
You can't do anything to delay death.
You can't die with your friend.
Wealth cannot be sacrificed to save you.
You can't be against death because of haughty power.

Does the wind blow in any direction?
Is there any date with death?
If death comes nothing can help except the Dharma.
Don't be worried about being separated from your old father.
Create a prayer called 'Büd Erdene' when you go to the place
 you have never been.
If you have something to ask me then ask now.[21]

Such elegant and descriptive prose is indicative of why so much time was needed to stage the performance. In the longer versions, dozens of other characters are introduced, although they had little to do with the main plot. They serve as side acts for additional commentary on Mongolian life and philosophy. One such character was the one-eyed, one-toothed, one-breasted, good woman of the mountain, who acted as a sort of creator-ogress, and was used to show the audience female strength. Tibetan scholars may recognize this character as Tsechigma (Sanskrit: Ekajati) who according to Tibetan legend, fought Padmasambhava and was subdued. She also functions as one of the three principal protectors of Dzogchen, the Nyingma's highest teaching order.

Theatergoers were probably pleased to see that Danzan Rabjaa included a number of humorous and insightful vignettes to the opera. These were played during intermissions to lighten up an otherwise heavy plot and provide further lessons in morality and mockery of Manchu authority. One popular intermission was a comic ballet called 'How Punishment Was Given to Five Witches.' In this story, a heavenly prince descends to Khamaryn Khiid and is welcomed by its people. Suddenly, a lame one-eyed Chinese hunchback appears on stage and secretly tells five witches about the lovely prince. The evil witches, lusting after the handsome young man, disguise themselves as five famous angels and are also welcomed by the people of Khamaryn Khiid. The head lama, however, is suspicious of the angels and asks the advice of Danzan Rabjaa, who makes a cameo appearance on stage.

"What is the use of a monk's studies if he cannot detect the difference between good and evil?" Danzan Rabjaa asks.

He then advises the monk to hold a great feast. In the following act, the witches appear on stage, drunk and staggering amid the other festival-goers. Danzan Rabjaa quietly asks a master sculptor named Baramsi to create an image of the prince, and in a very short time the work is complete. The witches see the statue and, mistaking it for the real prince, scoop it up and fly away. While in the sky they realize their folly, but are too late; the real angels arrive at Khamaryn Khiid and carry the prince back to heaven. The vignette is much like a children's fairy tale, providing a lesson in morality and having a pleasant ending.

Other vignettes included slapstick comedy routines. In one performance, the curtain opens to reveal an old man, his wife and their son sleeping in bed. Suddenly the Buddha appears in their home; the wife wakes up awe-struck and falls on her knees to pray. Likewise, the father falls to pray but in the dark of night manages to plant his face squarely into his wife's rear end. At that moment their son then wakes up. Horrified to see his father in such an unceremonious position, he begs his father to pray to the Buddha. "I have, my son," the elder says. "I've prayed to the Buddha and your mother too."[22]

A third comic skit shows a butcher wearing a black del and a black hat. These costume ideas were probably borrowed from the first act of tsam. The butcher cries out at the top of his voice, "Meat! Meat for sale! Buy meat!"

An old lama soon hobbles onto the stage and asks, "How many animals have you killed?"

The butcher replies proudly, "So many that I cannot count them all."

The lama grows angry and, poking the butcher with his cane, says, "Stop killing animals! That is a sinful act! You must now be ordained as a lama to repent for your sins!" When the butcher protests, the lama gives him a string of rosary beads and instructs him how to chant. The butcher, a practical man, takes the rosary and uses it to count the number of animals he has killed. The lama, again angered, grabs his dagger, presses it against the butcher's throat and growls through clenched teeth, "Now are you going to become a lama!?"

Needless to say, the cowardly butcher dons the yellow robes of a lama and begins to learn the prayers. But when the old lama leaves, the butcher cries out, "What a detestable occupation!" He tears off the yellow clothes, grabs his sack full of sheep parts and cries out, "Meat! Meat for sale!"

The scene is not only comic, but also serves a purpose in degrading hypocritical lamas. It is also a clear example of Danzan Rabjaa's ability to criticize the faith to which he was dedicated, a commendable ability in any time or culture.

"Life was difficult then because Mongolia was under control of the Manchus," explained the researcher D. Bold. "Rabjaa was relentless in his attack on societal wrongs and the Manchus, but not directly. He was a master at concealing his humor and ideas, but by the end of the performance, most of the audience should feel shame. He criticized religion, the rich, the poor, the powerful, unfaithful women and charlatan monks. He had a real sense of society."

Such vignettes were carefully programmed for specific audiences. Anti-Manchu or anti-imperial references were omitted when performances were held in front of visiting Manchurian officials, who Mongols saw as a people easily offended. Likewise, *Saran Khökhöö* itself contained some degrading references to Imperialist rule that were absent from the larger events staged at Khamaryn Khiid. The smaller, less advertised performances - usually those held at remote monasteries and thus not attended by Manchus or their supporters - were the venues at which Rabjaa delivered his most scathing attacks on authority.

Saran Khökhöö remained on stage for years after Rabjaa's death, even into the 1920s. The scripts, props and costumes were kept safe by the lamas of Khamaryn Khiid, and it was the Seventh Noyon Khutagt who was largely responsible for the revival of the play after a period of theatrical inactivity. He staged the play at Khamaryn Khiid and other locations, including Tsagaan Tolgoi Temple in Khanbogd sum, Dornogobi province. In 1960, the livestock-breeder Yondon, interviewed by Damdinsuren, remembered watching the play at a two-story theater that opened onto a large courtyard. Like Danzan Rabjaa, the Seventh Noyon Khutagt invited people from all walks of life to perform in the play. The Buduun Mergen Van himself (the regional prince) played the role of Guleranz.

There were differences, of course, between the performances directed by the Fifth and the Seventh Khutagts, one of which was the use by the Seventh Khutagt of a large prompt book set in front of the stage for use by the actors, but hidden from the audience. In 1987, an 85 year-old Gobi native named Sundi gave an interview in regards to his role as a stagehand in a 1920 performance of *Saran Khökhöö* at Tsagaan Tolgoi Temple.

"I remember that sixty people with thirty camels arrived in our village. They announced that they would perform a one-month long drama. They erected several gers and we could hear their music and singing in the evenings, but children were not allowed there," Sundi recalled. "They built a large stage and then came to us requesting forty volunteers to act in the drama as soldiers. They gave some lessons and selected the characters. They said I was too young for acting but let me open and close the curtains.

"The Seventh Noyon Khutagt, who was the director, was a well-built man with a dark face. It seemed as if he was always drunk. He gave all the instructions and told me how to raise the curtain. When the gong was hit twice it meant to lower the curtain part way, a long gong meant to lower it all the way.

"The audience was very emotional during the performance. People were falling in front of the actors that were dressed like gods as if they were in a temple. People came from all over to see it and soon there were tents everywhere. Nice gers and a special dining tent were made for aristocrats. I remember that each day a different actor played the king, so that many people had a chance to play the role. The show went from morning to evening and had a two-hour break at midday; a trumpeter announced when the play was starting again," Sundi concluded.[23]

Saran Khökhöö, along with the rest of the Danzan Rabjaa legacy, was resurrected from its grave after 1990. The theater group in Sainshand staged excerpts of the drama in 1993, shortly after they renamed their playhouse 'Saran Khökhöö Theater.' The performance was done in front of a packed audience and drew on local talent including several lamas. D. Sanjmetov, a Sainshand native who has worked at the theater since 1967, played the part of Yamshe.

"It is a wonderful libretto, especially because it was written at a time when there was no drama. The use of singing, dancing and artwork was a landmark. It offered different messages on different levels, but one of the main ideas is respect for women and humanity in general," Sanjmetov said.

Sanjmetov explains that before 1990 the local feeling towards Rabjaa was one of mistrust. Many locals considered him a drunken womanizer. But Sanjmetov explains that democracy brought with it a change in attitude.

"We didn't study Danzan Rabjaa during the Communist period, but now we see him in the real light. He has come to be a symbol of the Gobi and I think we are all his children."

Sanjmetov added that if financial conditions are met, his theater group dreams of someday putting on *Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo* in its original form, as a one-month epic.

Chapter Seven: The Great Poet

> Mongolian literature is like a huge garden with beautiful smelling flowers and trees. One of the most beautiful flowers in this garden is Danzan Rabjaa's writing. When you read his works you can feel music and artwork, you will understand dance and hear the thundering of horse's hooves, you will imagine the love between a boy and girl and you will smell the sweet scent of *airag*.
>
> *D. Tsagaan*[1]

While he was renowned for his dramatic productions, Danzan Rabjaa would have considered himself first and foremost a poet. So finely crafted was his prose that the Mongolist Walther Heissig was moved to compare its lyrical depth and thematic breadth to those of J.W. Goethe. Indeed Rabjaa's countrymen must have had great respect for his words. Scribes diligently noted down his poetry as it spilled from his lips, whether or not he was sober or drunk.

Rabjaa was not merely piecing words together for the sake of creating proper or beautiful poetic works. He wrote when events moved him. His poetry contains the lessons he had learnt in his life. It both condemns and gives praise. It is appreciative and critical. It expresses the love of his homeland, the splendor of nature, the strength of horses, the beauty of women, and the importance of integrating human life with the natural world. Deeply etched with love for life, his poetry reached out to the romantics and visionaries of his time.

These were revolutionary ideas for Mongolian poetry; never before had a poet brought lyrics so close to the public. Rabjaa, more than any other Mongolian intellectual, attempted to bring social progress to everyday people. This accomplishment was even recognized during the latter part of the Communist era, when educators began promoting Danzan Rabjaa's poetry, with their own Marxist spin.

Rabjaa's poetry showed his ambiguity as a man torn between deep religious commitment and love of secular life. At one and the same time his works compare, as Heissig writes, to Latin poetry of the Middle Ages in their drunkenness and vivacious praise of women, while at the same time showing his awareness of finality and need for ethics to propel him into the next life.

Alcohol played a significant role in his writings. He often signed at the end of his poems, "son of Dulduit, Crazy Drunken Rabjaa wrote this," or "the dumb drinker wrote this poem." Ironically, such statements only seem to add to his allure as a mysterious and true khutagt. Rabjaa, however, rarely condoned drinking. At times he recognized it as a sin: "Tasty, tasty. But it's black spirits. If you examine it well, it's one of the eight hells," Rabjaa wrote in the poem, 'Three Jewel Lama.'[2]

Since Rabjaa wrote while both sober and drunk, the poetry itself has a duality about it, oscillating from clear-headed teachings and observations of the world to romantic ramblings that often end with vague abruptness. Much of his poetry, however, was not written by his own hand. Scribes, including his principal assistants Khaliut and Jamynshagvar, were on hand to write down the poems as Rabjaa dictated them. These scribes may also have assisted in editing the poetry.

Allegory and comparative phrases are common in his poetic works. "Although salt is bitter by itself, it is pleasing if part of a dish," he wrote. "Although the taste of wine is sour, it beautifies the festival."[3] His poetry is also influenced by Tibetan and Indian literature, as well as Chinese proverbs, sometimes borrowing lines from Confucius. He employed traditional folklore, mentioning in his poem 'Relieving Soul,' the Pancha Tantra, the classic Indian moral story of an elephant, monkey, rabbit and bird, the four of whom climb upon each other's backs to reach a tree filled with fruit.

As a man who lived in desolate areas and often traveled across huge landscapes, it is not surprising that nature filled a prominent role in Rabjaa's writings. While admiring the world around him, speaking lovingly of summer weather and flowers in bloom, Rabjaa also understands that nature can be daunting and powerful, as described in the poem 'Full Moon of the Month.'

When we have the full moon
We can see far;
For a clever person
Future events are clear.

By riding my horse
I crossed the mountain;
Since I am a man
I have to wade through life.

A strong eagle with rich feathers
Flies above the Khangai;
Thinking about myself
I became distant from the earth.

Only the sun has light,
And I could see far;
In the younger years of my life
I left the earth with suffering.

The poor eagle fledgling
Is lost in the forest ;
And young ones are hungry,
Who are lost among the humans.[4]

The deep attachment to the land coupled with the pain endured as man "wades through life" reflects Rabjaa's dual persona as a man in love with the world and also tortured by it. Reflecting upon his childhood, Rabjaa recalls being "lost" amongst the human race and leaving the suffering of the Earth, which may reflect his heartache as a beggar boy and later entry into the protected micro-world of the monastery. Yet never satisfied even with his privileged status, he bemoans his distance from reality and regrets that he could not simply fly into the world like a bird. The binary use of distance and closeness seems to be an aspect of his Buddhist education, which taught him that the world can be simultaneously far off and immediate. The poem delivers a strong message that even a man of such 'perfection' can be torn apart by troubled emotions.

When Rabjaa speaks of "leaving the earth with suffering" he makes a reference to the Buddhist belief in transcending the Wheel of Life.

Buddhist ideas do not just filter into Rabjaa's poetry; they are at the root of all his poetry. 'Perfect Quality' (*Ulemchin Chanar*), for example, is one of many poems that appears outwardly unrelated to Buddhism, as it speaks mainly of the human senses. Yet from the point of view of someone practicing tantra, there is the belief that the senses in and of themselves do not impede enlightenment; in fact they are inseparable from their enlightened nature.

The poem connects one's behavior and flowers; a face with a mirror; a voice with the soft melody of a cuckoo bird; and the body with the scent of a sanal tree. The natural world, together with a passion for women and his love for Dadishura to whom it was dedicated, drives the poem forward. By the end of the poem the reader feels that Rabjaa's soul is still unsatisfied but that this will one day change. Rabjaa, however, seems content to simply acknowledge the nature of his self, that he can become happier even before all his desires have been conquered.

Full of immense quality,
Your beautiful face
Is just like a clear mirror.
When I see it, my perfect body[5]
Indeed captures my soul.

One who softens my hard heart,
Your soft polite words are
Just like melodies of a cuckoo bird.
When we talk awhile, your words
So encourage me,
My sweet-mannered one.

Your elegant body brings an exquisite scent
The moment I meet you,
Just like the sweet scent of sandalwood.
Originally created together,
It deeply moves my soul.

Your joyful way is
Just like the taste of honey,
Which boils over from the lotus heart.
Content with being unsatisfied
Increases the joy.

In this human life,
Let's float and be happy
On the ocean of bottomless happiness

Like attributes of the God of Love,
After fulfilling all desires.[6]

Rabjaa's later works are increasingly politicized, often filled with scathing and negative commentary about people in power. His passion does not wane over time, but transforms from songs of love to more critical and social issues.

This was a break from the normal restrictions of Mongolian poetry. 'Shame and Shame,' that we saw in the previous chapter, was not merely acclaimed for its powerful language and critical thought. It was also viewed as an example of proper Mongolian poetry, which maintains strict rules and structure.

Ideally in Mongolian poetry, each four-line stanza should start with the same letter, and each line should end with the same word. The first letter and last word are referred to as the "head and tail." Composing such poetry is no easy feat and Rabjaa often reminded his readers of this.

At the end of one 27-line poem using words that began with 'E' he wrote: "The son of Dulduit sang this by combining e-words."

In another poem he reminds the reader, "rhyming with the letter 'U' was done by the shorn Rabjaa."

This sort of 'rhyming' with the use of shared letters is virtually unknown in English literature.

'Shame and Shame' is a poetic form of Rabjaa's many *surgaal* (teachings, lessons). The surgaals, aimed squarely at his disciples, can be likened to those written by the eastern Mongol prince To Wang, although Rabjaa's tended to include more religiously-minded material.

Take for example this surgaal, a piece critical of disrespectful monks.

When (students) are in front of their teacher's face
They close their eyes and pray.
When (students) don't see their teacher's face
They lie in their own thoughts.

Students promise to follow their teacher's order
But these are deceptions.
They protect belongings of their friends
But their teacher's belongings are of no concern.

They hide their friend's secrets
Close to their heart, but
They will reveal the kind words
Of their teacher like thunder.

Students would not step on their teacher's sitting mat
When they are nearby,
But when teachers leave
The students disregard their belongings.

When students feel pleasant
They believe their own power has caused this.
When bad things occur
The students blame their teachers.[8]

Not all of Rabjaa's teachings were so contentious. He also wrote several proverbs that are still spoken today. For couples he advised the following: "If you have a fine lover, please keep a watch on your thoughts. If you have a bad lover, please test your urge to travel far."[9] Similarly, some of these teachings were put into lyrical form. Rabjaa uses the following poem to council his followers to appreciate life and recognize rewards.

Arise early in the morning.
Look at the high sky.
It will give you space
To your mind.

Have an idea in the evening.
Have a look at the sky with stars
And the beautiful world will love
You forever.

When the sun rises
Be impressed and look at it.
This shining ball will be there in the heaven
Blessing you by prosperity.

Clever man, wherever you go,
Look at the staggering tops of mountains.
This ever-precious nature
Will bless you.

Whoever you meet,
Look at him with a smile of friendly politeness
And then you will
Live with happiness and health for a long time.

Rabjaa's choice of words in this and his other poems was important in his role as an educator. He had great command of the Mongol language, providing truth and wisdom that could be understood by his largely uneducated audience. Still, the richness of his vocabulary was striking in the poetic sense. Tsagaan praised his writing skills and comments with the following on Rabjaa's teachings:

> Danzan Rabjaa's lessons played a considerable role in the moral education of the people. Rabjaa did not draw himself away from the life of the people. He was a contemplative person; he lived amongst the commoners and he was a keen judge of life. He was deeply moved by the absence of civil rights, the humiliation of the poor by the rich, class antagonisms, envy and the dishonors of that time. For this reason his works were filled with humanistic ideas.[10]

Rabjaa's most spellbinding parable-poem was titled 'The Kite.' The work was created in 1825 when Rabjaa was just 22-years old and is one of his best-known writings.

It follows the tune of a popular song of the day and includes old religious philosophies and quotations taken from folklore. It is in fact a moral tale categorized as one Rabjaa's nineteen teaching poems.

According to the parable, a person from a border area dreams one night of a man flying a paper kite. In the dream, the man lets the kite fly away, and is then visited by the border man who questions his life, ambitions and purpose. In the Tibetan tradition a border person is stereotyped as being uncouth, uneducated, barbaric, or at least without religion. This accounts for the need to gain instruction from the kite-flyer.

The story begins with a question.

"Is it easy to make this kite?" - the border man asks the kite flier.

The other responds, "Yes, it is easy."

"What else is easy to do?" - the man asks.

"Bad deeds are easy," says the other.

"What are there very few of?" - the man asks.

"People who do not defend themselves, of those there are few," the man responds.

"What are there many of?" - the man asks.

"Careless people with a bad fate," the other says.

"What is ugly?" - he then asks.

"The ignorant ones are ugly," says the other.

"What is beautiful?" - he then asks.

"A clear mind is beautiful," says the other.

"What is harmful?" - he asks.

"Hateful thoughts are harmful," says the other.

"What is useful?"

"A good mind is useful," answers the other.

"What is deception?"

"This life is deception."

"And what is true?"

"The Three Jewels are true."

"And what is evil?"

"The lack of Dharma is evil."

"And what is good?" - he then asks.

"Courage is good," says the other.

"And what is the nature of man in this time?"

"Oh woe, to ponder the character of the people of the present time, it is as if one tears apart the rope which connects us to this world. When they make offerings to the Three Jewels they feel as if it is a burden. When they listen to teachings they feel imposed upon.

"People making friends with monks slowly make them their slaves. They (are selfish and) would guard everything that belongs to them, even if it was a dog. They (don't care for others and) would leave anything that belongs to others even if it was Buddha.

"They behave nicely with one who is rich even if he is their enemy. They would even leave their own parents if they were poor. If it promises gain they would make their bodies slaves. They escape from good karma if they have no courage. They would praise even a thief if they fell in love. They would have friendship with devils if there was a partnership. I cannot describe all this badness of samsara."

He concludes by saying, "To be brief, being tied by the karmic rope in the prison of the world (samsara) and being drunk by attachment in the darkness of ignorance, cut by the knife of anger, burned by pride, gone mad with jealousy, tortured by the suffering world!

"Pity on all of them. Poor living beings. Life without essence, the rescue rope is cut. The eye that sees what should be abandoned and cultivated is blinded. Pity on them all these poor living beings."

Then the man asks - "In such a bad time, what direction should one go to find truth?"

The other answers, "Though being watchful is one's best friend, do not be critically watchful of your lama, father, mother or Three Jewels.

Though being friendly is the highest skill, do not befriend people with bad karma. Though it is tradition to talk in a meeting, do not talk too much.

"There is no refuge higher than Buddha, so keep your faith and do not become suspicious. There is no wisdom higher than the Dharma, so learn it and do not take pride. There is no support higher than Sangha, so respect Sangha and do not try to find fault."[11]

The excerpt is followed by continued teachings of Dharma, as well more personal stanzas. Rabjaa then writes, "Many false and true words are written here for the purpose of entertainment," indicating a sense of playful humility.

These breaks in the action indicate that Rabjaa was somehow writing the piece while falling in and out of mood swings. But the passage does more than entertain. It educates on morality, the need for honesty, and the importance of piousness.

The piece is befitting of Rabjaa's contradictory nature. Here was a man of wild habits that could step into the shoes of propriety when it came time to write.

For Rabjaa, writing was a fantasy world in which he could express the peace and calm that he so longed for. Words gave him an outlet for pleasure and goodness. Likewise, Rabjaa also reflected himself negatively through his words. He must surely have been speaking of himself when he wrote: "There is no hell, but if you perform bad deeds you will create your own hell." Such a statement was a warning to himself as much as to others, that the illusion of hell could be created by negative thoughts or deeds.

The anti-Manchu monks that raised Rabjaa in Inner Mongolia perhaps influenced his moral standards and critiques, just as Rabjaa influenced other writers who came after him.

It is probable that the Inner Mongolian poet and novelist Injanashi (1837-1891) studied Rabjaa's works and incorporated them into his own teachings. Injanashi, an eccentric historian, wrote a prose saga called *Khökh Sudur* (*Blue Chronicle*), which condemns those Mongols who had lost their identity and instead studied Chinese culture and history. Injanashi praised the efforts of Chingis Khaan and ordered all Mongols to respect his spiritual authority and unite in the face of Manchu aggression. The book, however, was not published until long after the author's death and failed to have much of an impact.[12]

Just how much of Rabjaa's works actually circulated in Mongolia and the effect his works had on the writers who followed is unknown.

Certainly his poetry is studied now more than ever before. His written words have struck a chord with modern Mongolians seeking social change and a reformation to the ills of their troubled society.[13]

The following is a sampling of some of Rabjaa's best known poems.

◆

The Pleasures of High Summertime

Let me sing my words of truth
As a gift of this day's gathering.
In the beauty of your good manner
And pleasure of fine summertime,

In the soft wind of autumn,
When the leaves and flowers sway,
When meadows and grasses flutter and ripple
I think of you the only one.

When the cuckoo of joyous summer sings,
When I see folks of my age,
Your beautiful and gentle manners
Turn more and more towards me.

The mist spreads out
When the geese just flew back,
And new clouds pile up -
All this suddenly moved my feelings.

In the faraway land that seems to turn blue,
The mirage of geese struggle to move
And the breath of the clear lake
Moves my calm mind.

In this my feeling of missing you,
Clear as the moon,
The words you said when we met
Are sharp as starlight.

This human body which was found,
This life which is so easy to lose,
The darkness of desires that make one ignorant,
Make one lost - this is the nature of the world.

In the intensity of youth,
Thanks to you we met in this life.
In the light of clear emptiness,
May we meet on the path to nirvana.[14]

Through the Eight Directions

The way lotus leaves
Sway through the eight directions,
The swaying of the leaf
Like the behavior of the narrow river,
My only companion.

Like the *pi-wang*'s sweet melody,
Your song enchants me
With elegant words.
She is honorable and beautiful,
More special than others.

The way she was born,
With a holy virgin smell,
The scent of your lover.
This scent will come from far away,
You will most certainly feel excitement.

Like the pure water of heaven,
It brings sweet desires.
And your way is lovely,
You hold my grasping mind,
Like the moon on the fifteenth day.

Like the blazing hot sun,
You open the lotus to life.
You eliminate wild darkness.
I shall stay close to Padmasambhava,
I shall be joyful and happy.[15]

The Five Signs

The hot wind just blew.
Each place thawed out.
Migrating birds are here.
Signs of springtime.

The sun just rose.
The rain has fallen.
Grass and plants have awoken.
Signs of summertime.

The fine wind blew.
Leaves and flowers become yellow.
Drove back the ones with fine voices.[16]
Signs of autumn.

The thick clouds came out
And covered the high Khangai.
The cloud's snow fell down.
Signs of wintertime.

The midday sun sinks.
Youthful age passed.
Thick hair becomes gray.
Signs of aging.

This song's name
Is the 'Five Signs.'
The precious Noyon Khutagt
Has created and sung it with melody.[17]

Topaz

Great is the wisdom of topaz,
Great is the happiness of the Mongol lands.
Great is the assistance of horse and camel,
Great is the need for firewood.
Nothing is plentiful when all is exhausted.
Nothing is believable when someone laughs.
Nothing offers nourishment when you've eaten.
Nothing is helpful in scholarship.

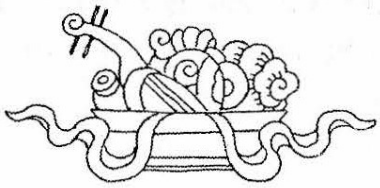
Far is the length of the springtime journey.
Far away is pleasure for a mind that's dissatisfied.
Far on the horizon lies the Khangai.
Far away are the friends of a jealous man.

Foolish it is to teach those who lack understanding.
Foolish it is to joke with those who are irascible.

Foolish it is to hang around with those without stability.
Foolish it is to encourage those whose minds lack emotion.

A sign of loyalty is to criticize without reserve.
A sign of wisdom is to consider deeply.
A sign of a lover is to talk without secrets.
A sign of friendship is to have similar thoughts.

May the lives of our saints be long,
And may the lives of our friends be full.
May the suffering of beings be pacified in the world,
And may we take pleasure in openness and wonder.[18]



Chapter Eight: The Renaissance Man

> Danzan Rabjaa was a genius and a prophet who understood the secrets of nature. He was a fortuneteller, he could stop wars and he could create rain to end drought. His poetry was the basis for modern Mongolian writers. Danzan Rabjaa composed melodies and poems, directed dances, and built cultural centers. He is not just a renaissance man in Mongolia, but unique among men in the world.
>
> *D. Baatar*[1]

During the later years of Rabjaa's life, June 15th of every year witnessed a special ceremony on a knoll near Khamaryn Khiid. Women would gather on the hill in the morning, encircle two *ovoo* symbolizing female breasts, and flick milk into the air with spoons. While women came to the site to purify themselves and honor the spirits, men could only come to visit after the death of their mother.

This celebration was a particular honor for women at that time, given the usual Mongol tradition of forbidding women to climb to the top of sacred hills and mountains.

"Breast Ovoo," created by Danzan Rabjaa, is symbolic of an important value he imposed on his disciples: the equality of women. One drives by the site even today on the road into Khamaryn Khiid.

"Danzan Rabjaa was the first Mongolian writer to bring love and women close to ordinary people," said Tumorbaatar of the Mongolian National University and a researcher of Rabjaa's poetry. He continued, "His goal was to elevate the status of the lower class by showing that, even if they didn't have the wealth of the aristocracy, everyone has similar emotions. Rich or poor, every person can experience love and hate, joy and sorrow."

Rabjaa states in his autobiography that his first sexual encounter was with a middle-aged woman who acted as his instructor. He was fifteen years old at the time. The incident might have been his first lessons into secret tantric practices, practices which Rabjaa later did not think should be concealed any longer.

"Rabjaa's instructions on tantra showed his disciples how to get in touch with sensitive mental points. It is a deep philosophy, understandable only to highly-educated people," explains Mongolian artist G. Tsagaanderem, another researcher of Danzan Rabjaa's artistic endeavors. "If you can understand the prayers associated with each position of male-female tantra then maybe you could fly, walk through walls or remember things that happened when you slept or even in your previous lifetimes."

Rabjaa's support for women became so well-known that aristocrats and nobles from Korea, Japan, China and Tibet sent their best female students to study at his Gobi monasteries. Legendary stories tell how the number of young women sent to him eventually reached 108, an auspicious number according to Buddhist tradition. The exact nature of the relationship Rabjaa shared with these women is unknown. Some were tantric partners while others remained students. Their presence at Rabjaa's monasteries, however, caused anxiety among other leaders. Malicious rumors about his behavior spread in Khuree, where Rabjaa was particularly unpopular.

Two women, Dadishura and Baljudmaa, were considered his wives, although this term should be used carefully as no formal marriage between them ever took place. Dadishura, who came from the region around Erdene Zuu monastery in central Mongolia, was the more prominent of the two and considered an intellectual equal to Rabjaa. She wrote music, she choreographed plays and she worked in Rabjaa's traveling theater group. The year of her birth is unknown but she was probably older than Rabjaa, since he referred to her as his 'aunt.' If Dadishura was Rabjaa's yin, then Baljudmaa was his yang, a beautiful, young and graceful woman, who came from the Khangai mountains. It was her radiant looks that inspired so many of Rabjaa's love poems. Rabjaa met Baljudmaa (some sources call her Sogtzuul) on a visit to Khuree in 1840. Captivated by her beauty and charm, he traveled to her homeland in Arkhangai where they spent the summer together.

Baljudmaa gave birth to a boy, who Rabjaa named Dunkhor, one of perhaps several illegitimate children.

Danzan Rabjaa writes about his son in *My Fine Cream White Horse*:

> The sandalwood tree
> Is fixed, not rigid.
> My son has a destiny
> To learn without instruction.
>
> The coconut tree
> Is dark brown and solid.
> My son has a gift
> To learn without difficulty.[2]

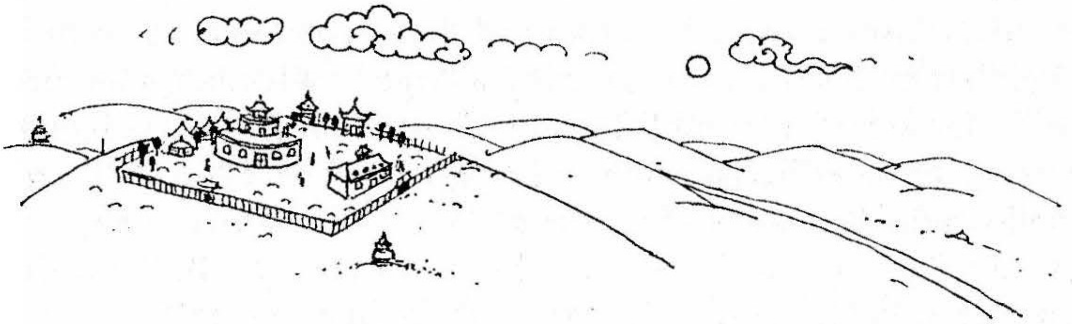
Dunkhor was sent to a monastery in modern-day Arkhangai Aimag at a young age and was recognized by elder lamas as a khuvilgan. He was known as the 'Khutagt of Tamir' and was renowned for his singing ability. Dunkhor kept a collection of over 300 songs, describing the beauty of Arkhangai Aimag and the longing for a lost lover. It is presumed that these songs were written by his father. Dunkhor lived more than 80 years, dying shortly after the 1921 Communist Revolution.

The fact that Danzan Rabjaa had fathered a child may have caused alarm among some Buddhist leaders, but what seemed more troublesome was that Danzan Rabjaa allowed the monks and nuns at his monastery to worship and live together. Ignoring their complaints, Rabjaa wrote, "Everyone is born of the same blood, so let this blood mix. It is true that even the Buddhas join their flesh together. Men and women live together; this is the law of nature. One cannot go against nature."[3] Danzan Rabjaa was clearly looking beyond the traditions of Buddhism, seeking to break down its barriers and thus reform it.

Despite his belief that men and women could co-exist, Rabjaa's decisions were not always followed. Pressure from the Gelugpa caused many of the Khamaryn Khiid monks to segregate themselves from the nuns. According to the legend, influenza spread across the monks and nuns quarters at Khamaryn Khiid after the men and women were separated. When asked why they had been afflicted with the disease, Rabjaa explained that the separation of the sexes had offended the female Buddha-protector of Khamaryn Khiid, the Amaa Buddha.

"He respected women and showed that they could be educated and skilled. In fact, many of the nuns of Khamaryn Khiid were considered more powerful than their male counterparts. That was shocking for people in those days; they were not used to seeing men and women working together, or seeing women so respected. His lesson made Gobi people more reverent to women,"[4] Altangerel explains.

Continuing the tradition of prayer to Amaa, Altangerel organized a special ceremony for the deity when the monastery re-opened in 1990. Since then, the monks at Khamaryn Khiid have taken a very liberal approach to their views of women. "Women can give as much to Buddhism as any male lama. Their minds are open, free and willing to accept the Buddha's teaching. Danzan Rabjaa pressed this upon all his disciples,"[5] says Dösh, the abbot at Khamaryn Khiid.



Baldan Khajod Ling, a female practice hermitage established by Rabjaa on the outskirts of Da Khuree, or modern-day Ulaanbaatar

While Rabjaa expressed his appreciation for women and their intellectual abilities, he likewise expressed his disregard for aggressive men. There is a fable related this called the "Drunken Men of Gobi Mergen Van Khoshuu," and along with providing a moral, it gives us more insight into the creative mind of 19th century Mongol storytellers.

The story describes how alcohol-related violence was increasing in the khoshuu, much to the dismay of local leaders, and the women of the khoshuu. The Regional Governor Lasurenbazar was at a loss at how to quell the situation and called on Danzan Rabjaa for assistance. Rabjaa agreed to help pacify the people and made an announcement that all men should gather for a special theatrical performance. Crowds of men, all drunk and staggering about, were soon assembled before the main temple, eager to see the Khutagt's performance.

Rabjaa appeared on the roof of the temple and called for the attention of the drunks. As a show of his powers, he pulled open his robes and urinated on the roof. His urine trickled over the edge, but then magically flowed right back up to the temple roof before hitting the ground. This is similar to a story told about the Sixth Dalai Lama, who urinated from the roof of the Potala Palace and just before it hit the ground, returned the urine back to the roof.

The drunks were astounded. The Khutagt called down to the men, "If any of you can perform such a feat, climb up here and show us." No one moved, they were too terrified of the great monk. Rabjaa spoke again, "You are all so weak and small compared to me! So why do you behave with such wildness? You behave like a male goat in the autumn! You must put an end to this abhorrent behavior, stop drinking and stop insulting women."

Rabjaa climbed down from the roof and assembled the drunkards around a dining table. He announced that a meal was being provided in their honor. Each was then served a large bowl of hot, steaming dog feces. "Please eat and drink!" he said. They refused and said they would never eat the feces. Rabjaa grew angry again. "Aren't you all like dogs?!" he bellowed. "Because you are drunks you eat whatever scraps of food that you find in your hand. So why don't you eat the food that has been placed before you? Why are you refusing to eat it?!"

The Khutagt breathed deeply and spoke again. "Now you understand that you are flesh and blood and your body is all you have, so don't punish it with vodka." Rabjaa then chanted a prayer and the dog excrement turned into wonderful, sweet smelling fruit. Following this god-like show of power, there was no more violence or abuse of alcohol and women.[6]

This is one Danzan Rabjaa legend that does indeed have historical basis. The story is likely to stem from an incident in 1852, in the wake of the Taiping Rebellion, when rebels were still on the run in China and threatened what was a peaceful period in Outer Mongolia. Noblemen from Tushet Khaan Aimag and Tsetsen Khaan Aimag, as well as Manchurian officials, feared that the rebels would stir up trouble in Mongolia and asked Danzan Rabjaa to conduct a religious ceremony to keep the rebels out of their territories.

Like many stories about Danzan Rabjaa, there exist similar tales to this one, and it can be difficult to determine which one is closer to the truth.

According to one other version, Rabjaa assembled his monks to the temple after hearing that they had been fraternizing with the local women. Climbing up on the roof, he exposed himself and ejaculated into the air. The moment before the stream was to hit the ground he reabsorbed it into his body, telling his monks "If you can do this, enjoy all the women you like. If not, observe your vows." This version would be more in keeping with tantric techniques and also parallels a tale about the Sixth Dalai Lama.

Likewise, the second part of the story has another variant. In the alternative tale, Rabjaa is attempting to correct those who imitated his drinking habits, without the ability to turn vodka into nectar. The story states that a dog has vomited in a barrel of water and it's left to fester for three days. Again Rabjaa assembles the drunks and teaches them a mantra. He explains that anyone who speaks the mantra with a pure heart can transform the vomit into something delicious. He encouraged the drunks to try, which they did, but all failed. One woman was able to cause a sweet fragrance but could not change the taste of the water. Finally Rabjaa spoke the mantra, causing a beautiful smell, and then drank the entire barrel of water. "When you can do as I do," Rabjaa said, "you may enjoy all the drink you like. Until then, it's best to avoid strong drink."

In addition to Rabjaa's many talents as an artist and lover, he was also said to be a skilled medical practitioner and medicine maker. Wherever he traveled, Rabjaa took with him herbal medicines to cure the sick. Some came to him on horseback from distant areas, seeking medicine and advice. Fabulous legends also tell of Rabjaa curing the sick from great distances by using mental telepathy and prayers in all manner and form. A favorite story told by Dösh, the abbot of Khamaryn Khiid, describes a distraught father whose son has gravely fallen ill. One day, the man decides to meet Danzan Rabjaa to ask for advice on how to cure his son. After explaining the circumstances of his visit, Rabjaa ducked inside his ger and came back with a flintlock gun. Positioning the heavy gun towards the man's ger, a full 60 kilometers away, Rabjaa took careful aim and fired. The shot rang out and a plume of smoke rose from the barrel of his crude weapon. Rabjaa put away his gun and said "Go home now, your child is better."

Confused, frightened and bewildered, the man mounted his horse and rode home. Upon arrival he found his child completely revived, healthy-looking and in good spirits. There was also a gaping hole in the ger wall. "How did that happen!" the man asked his wife.

"We were just sitting here when we heard the sound of guns," the wife said. "Then the ger wall collapsed. Our son started vomiting pus, and now he is better!

"A flintlock gun can only shoot 800 meters but Danzan Rabjaa could shoot 60 kilometers for the purpose of healing others. This was the power of his Buddhist healing abilities," Dösh Lama explained.[7]

Rabjaa's eccentric methods for healing did not stop there. He also employed the use of *chod,* a type of tantric practice used to heal his patients. Chod dates back to 12th century Tibet, developed by a woman named Machig Labdrön. It begins when a practitioner visualizes his or her physical body cut up and transformed into white and red food. The white food is for the pacific spirits and red is for the violent and demonic forces. The food is then offered to all beings, to the whole universe, to satisfy their cravings and bring them enlightenment. In this way the practitioner loses attachment to his or her physical body.

According to one legend in which Danzan Rabjaa employs chod healing, a grief-stricken mother and father brought their unwell child to Rabjaa. When they entered the great monk's ger they found him drunk, a bottle of booze in one hand and a naked young woman in the other. Embarrassed and disappointed, the couple excused themselves and asked to be let out. But Rabjaa refused and demanded to know why they had come to his ger. Thus they told the story of how their child had become mortally ill and that no other monks could heal him.

Rabjaa asked the couple to set the boy on the table, which they did. Slowly he rose in his drunkenness, grabbed a steel sword and cut off one of the boy's arms. Horrified, the mother and father watched Rabjaa fling their child's bloody arm under a bed. He did the same to the other arm, and then to both legs. Finally, he decapitated the boy and rolled the head under his furniture. He then instructed the mother and father to return in two days, at which time they could retrieve their boy.

The shocked parents left the ger consoling each other, but still followed Rabjaa's instructions and returned on the appointed day. Again they found Rabjaa drunk, lying on his bed with a naked girl. He asked why they had come, and when the parents reminded him that they had come for their boy, Rabjaa recalled their previous visit.

Stumbling out of bed, Rabjaa reached under the furniture, picking up the torso, four limbs and the head. Setting the various bits of human anatomy on his workbench, Rabjaa began fitting the pieces together as though the child were a broken toy. This imagery may have been familiar to shamans who at a young age are taken by the spirits, torn limb from limb, and reassembled. But it's more likely that the story, theatrical as it may sound, has closer links to the chod tantric practice.

At last Rabjaa replaced the boy's head on the torso, uttered a prayer, and brought him back to life. "Your boy is now healthy again and you may leave," Rabjaa told the family.[8]

A little bit of humor resonates through many of these Danzan Rabjaa healing legends. Take for example the tale of the 'sacrificial domino.' The story must be prefaced with the knowledge that in Mongolia a domino with four dots is called 'Yods,' and a domino with two dots is called 'Yods khuu,' son of the Yods.

According to the story, a worried man goes to a famed Tibetan lama-astrologer and asks about the fate of his ill brother. The lama consults his astrological instruments and determines that the brother will die after one week and there is no cure for his ailment. The man is distraught, but decides that he needs a second opinion and thus pays a visit to Danzan Rabjaa.

Upon arriving at Khamaryn Khiid, the man finds Rabjaa in a courtyard playing dominoes. Yet he is ashamed to disturb Rabjaa, particularly since he already consulted another lama. So he waits. Finally, without any prompting, Rabjaa asks the man about his brother.

"He is very sick, Khutagt. But how did you...

"I can read your thoughts," says Rabjaa. "The Tibetan lama you met before was correct; there is no cure for your brother. He will be dead in a week. However, the Tibetan does not know how to save your brother. But there is a way." And with that he goes back to his game .

The man waits, believing that Danzan Rabjaa will explain how his brother can be saved. But Rabjaa says nothing. Instead, he picks up a domino, a 'Yods khuu,' domino with two dots, holds it aloft for a moment, then slams in to the table saying, "Yods khuu, you should die instead of this man's brother!" There is a resounding clack as the domino hits the table. The man is understandably perplexed. He thinks Rabjaa might be telling a joke, but the Khutagt does not laugh. Rabjaa ignores him thereafter, so the man goes home distraught.

As the days pass the brother's health shows signs of improvement. Miraculously, he is still alive after a week. The man thus returns to the Tibetan lama for an explanation. The Tibetan again consults his instruments. Spreading out pebbles and bones on the floor he studies their arrangement like tarot cards, and is amazed to see that the brother is indeed still alive.

"I see that somebody named Yods khuu has died instead of your brother! What a great sacrifice he has made, to die for your brother out of compassion. Do you know this Yods khuu? Does he live in your home area?" The Tibetan of course would not have understood the Mongolian domino reference and the listener gets a laugh at his expense. Fortunately, the man's brother is also saved.[9]

Although such stories are pure legend, this sort of telepathic and mystical healing employed by Rabjaa was actually quite popular among tantric practitioners. Yet even those who did not use tantra still had many uses for the "healing prayer." It is believed that prayers and chants can cure 101 different types of disease. In most cases the prayers are read aloud in the presence of the sick, as a sort of exorcism to drive the bad spirits from the patient's body. In some cases, a prayer would actually be written down on paper and swallowed.

Rabjaa composed several healing prayers. He used them frequently on his patients, who often included senior monks such as the Bogd Gegeen. One of the prayers was designed specifically for children, to which there is a legend attached.

Danzan Rabjaa had tried in vain for several months to compose the healing song, growing more and more frustrated with his writer's block. One night he was staying with a wealthy family on a trip away from his monastery. A feast of colossal proportions was prepared, and the family got to bed late after enjoying their hearty meal.

While sound asleep, Danzan Rabjaa was awoken by a loud wailing outside the felt tent. He was so saddened by the cries that he could not sleep. "The sorrowful voice began with a wail, dragged on to become a 'long song' and finished with misery and affliction," Rabjaa said.

After some moments of rest the song began anew, each time with more lamentable cries. Rabjaa lost his patience, got out of bed, threw on his saffron robe, and trudged out into the night. The family, meanwhile, did not stir from their peaceful, wine-induced slumber.

Rabjaa climbed a nearby hill, sat down and listened to the song. By daybreak his heart was weeping with sorrow and when the song ended, he had it memorized. This was the song of a she-wolf that had lost her cub. With this inspiration, Rabjaa was able to compose his prayer for the child.

It is said that anyone who listened to this sorrowful sounding melody would cry. The song, remarkably, can also induce the birth of a child. It is, of course, the melody and tone of the song that are essential for the prayer's effectiveness; the words are almost meaningless. Even so, it requires the expert singing of a spiritually advanced lama for the prayer to bring results. We can think of this as a lullaby. It's easy to fall asleep to soft, melodic singing, no matter what the language or lyrics. It was this theory that Buddhists applied to their healing prayers.

While melody was crucial to Danzan Rabjaa's songs, it is his fine lyrics that transcend time and culture. He used universal themes that are appealing today, one of which was the horse. Titles like 'My Fine Cream White Horse,' 'Lovely Rangy Brown,' 'Your Lovely Sandalwood Horse,' and 'My Strong, Swift Brown' are all dedicated to his favorite steeds. He often draws parallels between a proud horse and a lovely woman and often uses the horse as a symbol of freedom. In the following poem, *Tishgedelt Kheer* (Chestnut Steps), Rabjaa describes the love he has for his wife and his rush to see her. But at the same time he takes much pleasure in describing the horses he rides on his return home. One wonders which he truly favors more.

Taking from the group of horses
My chestnut, pacing,
Showing off nearby,
I'll pass the time with my angry wife.

I shall pass the summer training
My wild chestnut mare.
She'll be trotting out nearby
As I pass the time with my interesting wife.

They're growing dark and misty,
Our territory and yours.
Our one love
Residing in place.

The mountains of the Khangai
Darken into night blue.
One love, alas,
Residing in place.

A group of many horses,
And I take all the spirited ones.
Now I shall go back,
Please don't remember too much.

And please, don't forget
How I am honest.
And please don't hurry to ride away.
Surely the day is long, please do not go away fast.

It is scarcely possible to forget
Such a loving mind.
By the blessing of the Dalai Lama
May we be happy together, everywhere.[10]

In addition to writing odes about them, Rabjaa was also a keen horse trainer. A short dissertation on horse training, written by Rabjaa and now printed in small booklets, describes what traits trainers must be aware of before racing a horse. Bristling chest fur and leg spasms three days before the race are positive signs. A horse will lose a race, he wrote, if its teeth are yellowing, if it frequently bites people or other horses, has a darkened shade of face color, a wrinkled nose, a large stomach or a loss of fur. To write such a book might seem rather unconventional for a monk, but as we have seen, Danzan Rabjaa's pursuits reached well beyond Buddhism.

Aside from training horses, Rabjaa also took time to educate herders how to care for their livestock, barter their goods with passing caravan men and use natural resources to their fullest extent. In teachings to both his students and laymen, Rabjaa provided not only new and progressive ideas, but also founded schools, museums and libraries.

The establishment of an education center stemmed from his personal collection of foreign art and treasure, which grew to become a well-known museum. Included in his collection were Buddhist icons presented by the Dalai Lama, Manchurian rulers, the banner chiefs of China, and the princes of Korea and Japan. Of his many curios, it was said that his most prized possession was the head and skin of the Yeti, known in Mongolia as 'Almas.'

The mythical Almas is described by Gobi people as standing about seven feet tall and covered with a fine coat of red fur. Rabjaa described this creature as an "absent-minded marmot-eating beast." He acquired the skin and head from a wandering monk named Luvsondonoi. This monk had been traveling to Mongolia from Tibet when he found several dead Almas lying in the snow. He cut the skin off one and collected its bile (the bile was sold to the doctor of the Seventh Bogd Gegeen in Khuree). Danzan Rabjaa acquired the skin and kept it at his monastery Galbiin Ulaan Sakhosnii Khiid. In 1961, an elderly man by the name of Luvsondash reported his memories of what this monastery looked like before its destruction in the 1930s. Luvsondash told researchers from the Mongolian National University that the temple contained "a human-like skin that was covered in hair."[11]

In 1842, Rabjaa built a special temple to house his most precious artifacts; the Givaadin Rabjaaling Treasury was probably Mongolia's first museum. Inside the building, around the marble walls, were five white stone statues of shapely goddesses. In the hands of these female deities were lamps (*möngön tsogts*), which gave off a white glow. Hence, the visitors to this shrine called it the "White Temple."

The most important of the 10,000-plus exhibits at the White Temple was a horsehair banner that once, allegedly, flew over 13th century Mongol armies. The museum also held a small statue of the Indian poet Nagarjuna, which was supposedly cast in England. The exhibits were placed in a particular order so that natural items, minerals and plants, were shown first as the visitor entered the museum. A large statue of a woman in the nude was towards the front, symbolizing the natural state of human beings.

A storage room attached to the museum housed the bulk of its belongings in large leather-bound boxes. Because Rabjaa was concerned that goods from his monastery could be stolen or confiscated by Manchu authorities, these boxes were carefully stored so that they could be easily moved onto the backs of camels and evacuated. In one instance, this well-executed pre-arranged plan apparently foiled a real robbery attempt by brigands.

Rabjaa sometimes acted as a museum guide, but this task was usually handled by his two *gomiir*, or caretakers. One was a lama responsible for educating visitors on philosophy and religious topics. The other, a layperson, explained exhibits related to science and nature. The gomiir were charged with preserving the objects and used several techniques to do so. Cloth was protected from moths by a liquid made from crushed sagebrush and wormword. Artwork was protected from fading with the application of cow bile mixed with water. Wood exhibits were boiled in oil and water, and then stored in wood boxes filled with cow and horse dung.

As the museum grew, so did its importance as an educational center. Admission was free and assistants were on hand to read the textbooks to pilgrims. In exchange, visitors left a blue silk scarf (*khadak*). Rabjaa also hosted cultural competitions at the museum. Artists and poets competed with one another for the sake of honor. Winners were called 'Duvchin' and given a special place to sit inside the White Temple. They also received an engraved wood seal known as a *paiz* which granted them the right to teach at other monasteries in Mongolia.

"The White Temple was a real cultural center. It even had training courses for people who wanted to learn to read and write. The idea was that if you went there you became a sacred person," wrote researcher Ts. Tsendsuren.[12]

The museum was only one part of a larger project to educate laypeople. The library at Khamaryn Khiid, containing tens of thousands of books, both lay and religious, was also a landmark in Mongolia. It employed eight lamas, five translators and thirteen assistants to read the texts, most of which were in Tibetan script. Like the museum, the library was not closed off for the elite, but open to the general public, who could spend time with the assistants, asking them questions and reading the available materials. Equally impressive was the so-called 'Children's Temple,' which existed well into the twentieth century and was known for its intensive training, progressive teaching methods and variety of classes, including language, history, math, dance, art and singing. The classes even had their own coursework; some of the material was created or commissioned by Danzan Rabjaa, including a text called *Alphabet for Teaching and Memorizing the Law of Living,* which gave instructions on language and grammar. Most monasteries in Mongolia offered youth education, but the seminary at Khamaryn Khiid was believed to be one of the largest and most advanced of its time, offering free education to children regardless of their sex or class distinctions.[13]

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Chapter Nine: Adventures and Companions

As a poet who loved to travel and study the theater of other cultures, the stories about Danzan Rabjaa's adventures abroad are well-known. Although many seem fictional, most are based on real journeys to China and parts of Outer Mongolia. Rabjaa's own contemporaries even recognized him as a brave adventurer, exemplified in 1831 when noblemen of Alasha compared him to the Chan masters of old Chinese folk tales, such as Chi-Tien, the hero of a novel titled Chi-Kung Chuan.[1] The nobles came to this conclusion after they found Rabjaa mysteriously excavating a cave temple. Baffled by the behavior of this drunken, apparently sex-crazed monk, they decided to challenge his supposed brilliance.

"Test this newcomer from the Gobi who is accompanied by women and pupils. Test him on his strength of faith," they said to Alasha native Smonlam Rav Byamba Naavangstandar, a famed linguist and genius. He accepted their challenge and went to visit Rabjaa's camp, where he found the Khutagt drinking brandy. "Please take some," Rabjaa offered. But as a yellow hat monk, the linguist waved off the drink with defiance.

He then raised a finger and inquired, "Are there devils?"

"If one believes in devils then they exist. If you do not believe in devils then they do not exist," Rabjaa answered.

The linguist then asked, "Is there a master Buddha?" to which Rabjaa responded with equal vagueness, "In truth it is true; as a lie, it's a lie."

Growing more impressed by the moment by these insightful answers, the linguist finally asks, "After a human has died, does he return again as a human?" to which Rabjaa gave his final answer, "A human is born from a human, but whether a human is reborn from another human, I do not know." And, at such brilliance, the linguist retired back to the homes of the noblemen, to whom he reported his "defeat to the drunken genius of the Gobi."[2]

This is but one of many legendary stories about Rabjaa's adventures abroad. Other stories describe how such activities were restricted by order of the Manchus, who did not want the popular monk rabble-rousing. In 1850, legend says, the Emperor of China ordered Rabjaa to serve as a doctor in his army, with the real intention of separating him from his followers. When the Emperor learned that Danzan Rabjaa was to join the troops bearing a Mongol black banner, he ordered him to also bear a Manchu yellow banner. Rabjaa did as he was told and carried the yellow banner south. En route to his destination, however, he mended the Manchu banner by placing red cloth over the yellow and decorating it with the Soyombo, a symbol of the First Bogd Gegeen Zanabazar. It was such overt acts of rebellion like this one that continued to add to his legend.[3]

"The Manchus did not appreciate Rabjaa because he educated his people and opened their eyes to the reality of the world and the unjust society in which they lived. If the people knew the truth about their country it would cause instability. This is why he was separated from them," notes researcher D. Bold.[4]

While many legends tell of Danzan Rabjaa's conflicts with the Emperor, there is one instance of him siding with the Manchus. According to the tale, Rabjaa volunteered for the Emperor's army between 1839 and 1842, during the First Opium War. He contributed to the war effort, legend says, by conjuring up thunderstorms to damage the British fleet. He sent lightning bolts in the direction of their ships and had the ability to make ten Manchu soldiers look like a thousand, giving them a menacing appearance when they stood off against the British army. Yet, according to the story, Rabjaa lamented that even his powers could not help the Chinese, whose negative karma to lose the war was greater than his magic abilities.[5]

Did Rabjaa really meet the Emperor? While most people of the Gobi believe he did, the truth remains unknown.

We are left with one curious legend about a meeting between the two men. According to the tale, the Bogd Khaan dispatched Rabjaa to Peking as a representative of his government. The Bogd wanted to protest the increasing number of Chinese settlers arriving in Outer Mongolia, and asked Rabjaa to oppose this threat to Mongolia.

Rabjaa agreed and traveled to Peking as a diplomat. During the meeting the Emperor proved to be inflexible on many issues that concerned Rabjaa. He pushed Rabjaa hard on the population issue, insisting that the relocation of Chinese settlers would not cease.

Rabjaa decided to cool off the arrogant Emperor. In his hand he held a cup of wine that was half full. Tilting the cup towards the south, the wine came right to the rim of the cup. At that moment the earth in all of Peking tilted to the south and created much havoc.

"What are you doing!" the emperor exclaimed, nearly falling off his throne. "Stop this at once!"

Danzan Rabjaa stopped the earth from shaking, but the tremor was enough to make the emperor apologize for his aggressive behavior. To this day, the Mongols say, Beijing remains tilted towards the south.

Such incidents and adventures allowed Rabjaa to come to conclusions about foreigners and gave him perspective on his own people. He once recorded that, "The Chinese feeds himself with grass because he was born from the dragon. He is full of passion, knows no shame, is very careful, greedy and thinking of profit. The Tibetan feeds himself with flour because he was born from bad ghosts. He has no shame, is quick in wit, is very jealous and is full of bad plans. The Mongol eats meat because he was born from giants who ate people. He is proud, enjoys chatting, has little education or knowledge, and is very eager to attack his opponent."[6]

It is entirely possible that on one of these journeys in China, Danzan Rabjaa met the French missionary, the Abbé Huc. While the theory may be optimistic, their paths may have crossed at a guesthouse in a town called Chuang Lang, around the year 1844. In his book, the Frenchman describes his meeting with a Living Buddha, about 50 years of age. Huc wrote that the khuvilgan was "comfortably stout; his dark brown face denoted extreme good nature, but there was in his eyes, when you attentively examined them, a strange wild, haggard expression that was very alarming."

The age and description match Danzan Rabjaa perfectly, but unfortunately Huc does not tell his readers the name of this mysterious Buddha. This anonymous monk and the Abbé Huc sit down for a long chat. At first the monk was wary of sitting on the same level as a "mere mortal," but he conceded, overcome by curiosity. After small talk, the khuvilgan examined the Abbé Huc's Breviary, and touched it to his forehead respectfully.

He then punched his fists together and said, "Your religion and ours are like this." The Frenchman then admitted that he was a missionary with a goal to convert Chinese and Mongols to Christianity.

The khuvilgan leafed through the book again and asked for explanations of the engravings. Upon hearing about the crucifixion, he shook his head compassionately.

They met again later that same day for another talk, during which time Huc described his origin. The khuvilgan, unfamiliar with France, commented that one's origin mattered not, since all men are brothers. Before parting, Huc again comments that the lama appeared somehow "infernal and fiend-like," but added with respect that he was "a most amiable personage."[7]

Although we do not know the name of this khuvilgan, we can see that this monk was skeptical of foreigners. Sources say Danzan Rabjaa also harbored fear of foreign occupation of Mongolia. Chinese and Russians were coming to the Gobi to study and map the land, and Rabjaa watched them with mistrust. Oral legend has him as identifying "spies of nine languages." He specifically feared Russian archaeologists, believing them to be grave robbers.

There is a story attached to this. It tells how Rabjaa fought the 'foreign devils' by casting a shamanic spell upon them. He sacrificed a hornless black bull at a place called Ulaan Ovoo, mixed together its blood and cud, and read a prayer called "Khandain Magdag." The prayer incited the spirit of the ovoo to blow strong, horrible winds across the Gobi, raking the land with sandstorms that made work impossible for the foreign 'spies.' Some suffered from hallucinations and were sent back to their homeland, deranged and mad.[8]

Nineteenth century Mongolia was not an easy period for any type of travel, and Rabjaa's wealthy entourage invited brigands and bandits. Included in his drama company were twenty or thirty women and around ten men, including students, teachers and performers. Such travels certainly encouraged more legends.

It was recorded that, during one robbery attempt, Rabjaa leapt down from the caravan wagon and single-handedly slew seven or eight bandits, using his martial arts skills and a variety of weapons. Upon witnessing this display of heroism, a Japanese student presented Rabjaa with a sword from his native land. Mongolians would have been unskilled in the martial arts so it's likely that this Japanese student (or another disciple) provided the martial arts training.

The sword received by Rabjaa is now on display in Sainshand along with other weapons including daggers and throwing stars. The handle of the saber contains the word "Morito." Some believe this was the name of the Japanese prince while others suggest it might be the name of an old Mongolian ethnic group. Still others guess it is connected to the Mongolian word *moir*, which means horse. Because of this, the Japanese student has been dubbed the "Horseman Hero."[9]

Another "travel story" begins with Rabjaa's entourage coming upon a lonely ger in the desert. When the ger owners learn that the great saint is nearby they invite him to enter so that he might say a prayer for their broken-hearted daughter. Rabjaa enters the ger and upon seeing the girl, promises that she will live. The girl then opens her eyes and, even though she had never before met Rabjaa, cries out that he is the man she has been waiting for. Her health is soon recovered and she is told by Danzan Rabjaa to learn a song called "Full Moon of the Month," (see chapter 7) which she practices to perfection. When Rabjaa later returns to the ger she impresses him so much with her voice that he invites her to join his drama company.[10]

Rabjaa's powers as a tantric practitioner played a large part in his mythological history. There are stories about his being able to fly, speak with the dead, disappear into thin air and turn water into vodka. He seemed to never have to walk anywhere; between theater performances he would just fly into his ger for a rest. If he needed medicinal plants he could simply fly to Tibet, collect them, and fly back again.

In one tale, a student of Rabjaa went on a pilgrimage to Utai, a monastery town in Tibet. En route he stopped at a small monastery in Inner Mongolia in order to spend the night. While observing the activities of the monks, he noticed two lamas carrying dough sculptures out of the temple after the prayer session. The young Khamaryn Khiid monk exclaimed, "You take your sculptures outside using your own hands! At our monastery, the sculptures float outside by themselves!"

By saying this he was mocking his hosts, declaring that the lamas of Outer Mongolia, particularly those at Khamaryn Khiid, were more powerful than the monks of Inner Mongolia. Accepting this challenge the two monks said, "There is one sculpture left; please make it go outside by itself." Forced into the little temple with orders to sit before the remaining sculpture, the young monk suddenly found himself in a quagmire, for he had no power to move the statues. Nervously he sat before the altar and began to pray; but rather than pray for the sculpture to float out the door, he only prayed for Danzan Rabjaa's help. Over and over he whispered his teacher's name.

The lamas didn't notice he was calling for Rabjaa. Upon nightfall, the young monk opened his eyes and saw the sculpture float past his face and out the door. All the monks of the monastery, including the Khamba (Supreme) Lama, stood in amazement, and then bowed to the equally dumbfounded Outer Mongolian monk, who smiled shyly in their presence. The next day the young student quietly slipped out of the monastery and continued to Utai, still overwhelmed by his accomplishment.

Upon his return home he met with Danzan Rabjaa, who smiled and asked, "Did you have a good journey? Did you see many interesting things?"

The young lama described his adventures in detail, including the strange experience with the dough sculptures. Rabjaa laughed and said, "You were calling me all night and I could not sleep. So I went to help you. But you promised to do something you were not capable of doing on your own. You should only promise to do things that you can do!"[11]

Another popular story describing his superpowers tells that once, while traveling to Peking, Rabjaa met a beautiful child and gave her a book to read. The child's parents saw the man leave and when they entered the ger they asked their daughter who had given her the book. "Danzan Rabjaa!" she said with glee. The parents hurried outside to look for Rabjaa, but they couldn't see him, because he had already traveled past the horizon. As a tantric practitioner, Rabjaa had the ability to travel great distances quickly. One of his footsteps could equal hundreds of normal steps.[12]

Other stories describe how Rabjaa used his power to save others. Once, after a heavy rain, a dry wash in the desert was swollen with flood waters that swept away plants and livestock. One unfortunate herder was trapped in the torrent and called out to Danzan Rabjaa, pleading for help. The benevolent saint heard the man's cries and transformed himself into a large bush by the banks of the river so that the man could pull himself safely to shore. When he was at last safe, the man sat on the river bank and complained bitterly, and with ironic humor, that a bush saved him instead of his lama.[13] It is these and many other stories that continue to fuel the high level of interest in Rabjaa, his poetry and the lore that surrounds him.

Rabjaa did not underestimate the value of friendship. When he was not locked up with his work he surrounded himself with companions, wrote about them and waxed elequent on how they are won and lost.

It was his belief that persons of high rank easily lose their companions because of their arrogant behavior. This is exemplified in one stanza from the poem, "My Lama, Three Jewels":

> All the birds flee from a dried-up pool,
> And friends of the Khaan flee from the hard of heart.
> Fruit and flowers flee from an infected tree,
> And close friends flee from those who are obstinate.[14]

The lines confirm what we already know about Rabjaa; that he loathed arrogant behavior and recognized that disciples would desert any teacher who showed arrogance. Another poem, 'The Richness of Mount Sumeru,' extols the virtues of friendship, its benefits and its obligations. Two stanzas of the poem are the following:

> If you have a faithful companion,
> Even a darkened place can be musical.
> If you make friends in good faith,
> Joyful laughter is alluring.
>
> If you make friends in good faith,
> Where there is cruel mockery,
> You think of eternal friendship,
> And the day is long in passing.[15]

Historians and collectors of legend have pieced together the lives of several individuals associated with Danzan Rabjaa. One of the most prominently mentioned is Khilenhormoi, the *Sain Er* (Good Fellow) previously described as Rabjaa's bodyguard.

Khilenhormoi was one of many Sain Er, or *magu qulagayici* ("wicked robbers"), as the Manchus called them. The Sain Er, little more than brigands in today's terms, often made Chinese settlements the target of their raids. Most were army deserters who had little desire to defend the Chinese. The Sain Er were often ruthless in their attacks but were rarely organized. They traveled in small groups of five to six men, just enough for a highway robbery. They enjoyed special fame comparable to the likes of Jesse James or Robin Hood.

Togtaqu was probably the best known of all the Sain Er. An epic song about his career was still sung until the 1950s in Inner Mongolia. With the approval of Mongol banner authorities, he spent years antagonizing Chinese rule in Inner Mongolia. Between 1906 and 1910 he notched up no fewer than 104 raids against Chinese settlements, burning homes and tax records, stealing horses, gold, silver and other valuables, and distributing the booty to poor Mongol *arats*. Life was dangerous for such men; Togtaqu's wife was captured by Chinese soldiers and two of his children were killed in fighting, but he never turned himself in. Later in life, Togtaqu became the head bodyguard for the Bogd Gegeen in Khuree, and served the Mongolian government until his death in 1922.[16]

Danzan Rabjaa's bodyguard, Khilenhormoi, lived a couple of generations before Togtaqu. He actually came from a high-ranking family. His father-in-law was a wealthy aristocrat and horse breeder named Dendev Taij. Khilenhormoi proved himself an honorable comrade on many shared trips with Rabjaa. He never felt hunger or cold and was compared to a wolf. He went to sleep late, got up early and frightened away potential bandits with his size and strength. But he was also fiercely independent and would disappear for days or weeks without warning.

Legend says that Khilenhormoi was arrested by Manchurian soldiers and charged with various criminal activities, including theft and murder. He was sent to Peking for trial (and, presumably, his death). While being escorted out of the Gobi, his caravan passed a group of Mongols traveling north. Khilenhormoi's arm was broken at the time, a horrible injury inflicted by his captors that had completely snapped the bone in two. According to the legend, he amputated his own arm, gave it to the travelers, and requested that it be sent to Rabjaa. The caravan men, still flabbergasted by the amputation, took the arm and delivered it to Danzan Rabjaa, who was 'pleased' to have a relic of his friend. The arm, dried and preserved, was used in religious ceremonies at Khamaryn Khiid for years to come. Before its ultimate destruction in the 1937, Khamaryn Khiid curator Tuduv reported seeing the arm still in an honored place of the monastery.[17]

Heissig tells a similar tale in his work *History of Mongolian Literature Vol. 1*. According to his research, Rabjaa befriended anyone who was anti-Manchu. In the Chahar area Rabjaa met a man nicknamed the "Wild Black Hero," who at the time was imprisoned by the Manchus, his hands in irons and a yoke on his shoulders. This 'Wild Black Hero' asked Rabjaa to do something, *anything*, to comfort him during this time of misery.

In response, Rabjaa gave the prisoner a mirror and a razor and said, "Be clear like a mirror and sharp like a razor." Although this might have been ironic or funny to Rabjaa, the Black Hero considered it auspicious and praised the monk. The objects in the end did little to help; the 'Wild Black Hero' remained under the yoke until his death some twelve years later.

Another character mentioned earlier was the scientist Doyod, who helped Rabjaa select the location of Khamaryn Khiid. Doyod was a land examiner and an expert in earth sciences. He was also a poet and described landforms and soil content in lyrical verse. Doyod's main responsibility was to consult with Rabjaa on where and how to build temples, based on ground structure and sources of water. He was an ultra-nationalist and gained the respect of his peers by constantly defying Manchu intervention into his work. He was also fond of making scientific hypotheses. He once told Rabjaa that far beneath the surface of the Gobi Desert there lay a great ocean. Even today, many Gobi people believe that their desert rests atop an ocean.[18]

One common theme running through Danzan Rabjaa stories is that he not only made friends easily, but he earned the respect of these friends through his own charisma.

Consider the friendship that he developed with the famed shaman Jambal. This native of Khövsgöl had come to Khamaryn Khiid with five other shamans to meet Danzan Rabjaa. Having heard that Rabjaa was himself a powerful magician they challenged the monk to a competition and promised victory.

According to the legend, the five shamans conjured up a rainstorm with thunder and a fierce wind. Rabjaa stood and watched, not bothered by the tempest swirling around him. The shamans did their best to defeat him but eventually collapsed from exhaustion. Rabjaa pretended as if nothing had happened at all.

The shamans, having never seen such strength, immediately surrendered and bowed to Rabjaa. Jambal was so impressed that he decided to stay at Khamaryn Khiid to study with Rabjaa. Years later, upon his deathbed, Jambal promised that his spirit would "protect Khamaryn Khiid until every last brick disappeared." Following this remark, locals dedicated a hill near the monastery to Jambal, and still perform annual ceremonies to his spirit.

The list of heroes and villains is made complete with a nasty character named Us Getsul ("Hairy Monk"). Here we meet one of Rabjaa's contemporaries who practiced black magic. Us Getsul was from the Tangut country (Inner Mongolia) and had spent several years in Tibet.

He later settled at a place near Khamaryn Khiid called Gurvan Bayan.[19] His nickname was derived from his wild long hair, which supposedly supplied him with special powers. Us Getsul was famed for his knavery and ability to trick people out of their money, but he squandered his resources on gambling and women, and was perennially poor.

One story about Us Getsul describes how he met a Chinese trader in the desert and proposed a business deal. The trader was to give Us Getsul a large sum of silver in exchange for a flock of fat sheep with lovely wool coats. The trader agreed, handed over his silver coins and took his sheep, believing that he had struck a bargain. But that night the sheep vanished, leaving the trader with just some bits of wool. Us Getsul used his magic to steal the sheep back, which he sold time and again to unsuspecting traders.

Another legend tells about his theft of an animal stomach filled with oil. While en route to Tibet, Us Getsul stole one of these stomachs from a family he had stayed with. After fleeing the ger he continued on his way and came to a hill. But to his surprise he could not reach the top, being pulled back by some invisible force. The housewife from the ger, realizing her oil had been stolen, rode up to Us Getsul and said he could travel no further because a spell had been cast over him after he stole the stomach. She took back her oil, divided it in two, gave half to Us Getsul and sent him on his way.

Us Getsul traveled on to Tibet and became a powerful sorcerer, but never learned the lesson of kindness that the woman had taught him. Years later, upon his return to Mongolia, Us Getsul came upon the very same ger and wanted to test the black magic he had learned. He sat on the ground, stretched his hands out in front of him, closed his eyes and made an invocation for death. As he sat in the meditative state, he felt a hot bloody heart beating in his hands. At the last moment he 'returned' the heart to its owner.

Us Getsul, exhausted from his act of meditation, staggered into the nearby ger and saw the same woman who had given him the oil years before. Her face was pallid and covered in sweat. Her distressed husband stood above, holding her hand and wailing a prayer to the gods. "Please help us!" the old man cried. "My wife has nearly died!" Us Getsul stood silently, turned, and walked out the door. He had no remorse for his cruel deed.

It was under such circumstances that Rabjaa decided to punish his rival.

The incident began one day when Rabjaa, suddenly and without thinking, summoned his people to load up their camels with their belongings and travel into the desert. Rabjaa knew not why he was going, nor where, but only that he had to leave his monastery. Then in mid-journey he realized that he was under a spell cast by Us Getsul. Furious with the prank, he started meditating and called Us Getsul to his monastery.

The next day Us Getsul appeared with a basket of animal droppings on his back.

He had been collecting these when Rabjaa called, and under the spell hurried to Khamaryn Khiid without putting away his basket. When Us Getsul bowed before Rabjaa, Rabjaa cut off his long plait.

The magician's face suddenly became ordinary, and he lost all his magic powers.

Thereafter, it is said, Us Getsul played no more tricks on the Gobi people.[20]

Chapter Ten:
Travels to the Capital City

> Urga is the headquarters of the Buddhism of North Mongolia. It is also the stronghold of unblushing sin.
>
> *James Gilmour, 1883*[1]

Although mythology swirls around the middle years of Danzan Rabjaa's life – the friends he made, the foes he vanquished – the reality of his life was just as romantic as it had been in the days of heady travel and theatrical study that consumed his younger years.

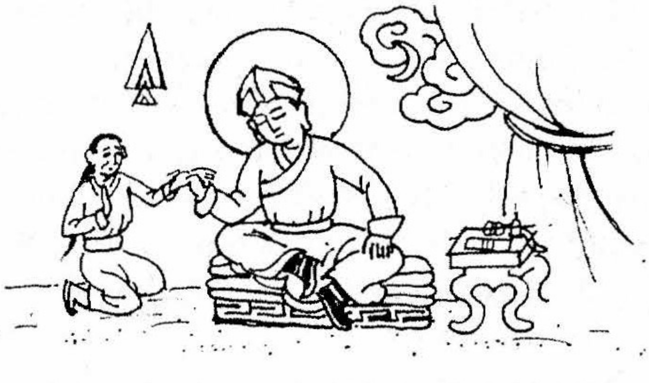
As mentioned in chapter three, he had spent much of his twenties in Inner Mongolia, studying theater in Chahar, Alasha and Doloon Nuur. In his early thirties, having dedicated himself to the staging of *Saran Khökhöö*, Rabjaa is found directing theater at Khamaryn Khiid and his monasteries in both Inner and Outer Mongolia.

It was at this time, with the production of *Saran Khökhöö* in full swing, that Rabjaa's worldview began to change. At the age of 31, in 1834, while traveling between Chahar and Peking, he wrote the poem 'Always True,' which includes lines such as:

> Life has been tumultuous
> I am sick of bearing life
> While I am drunk with brandy
> I don't have the strength
> To sit in peace
> So I say it in this grating poem

In this time, Rabjaa's addiction to alcohol seemed to be reaching a critical point, which may have been the reason for a slowing down in his activities in the mid-1830s. His biography passes over these years, only mentioning that in 1836 he traveled in southern Gobi Mergen Van and to Chahar to give Buddhist teachings.

The next significant event in Rabjaa's life occurred in 1839, when news came that the Bogd Gegeen had fallen gravely ill. Although Rabjaa was much closer to the Janjiya Khutagt of Doloon Nuur, he still felt honor-bound to assist Mongolia's spiritual leader and therefore immediately rushed to Khuree to offer healing prayers for the Bogd.



Rabjaa treats the Bogd Gegeen

Following this, he traveled west to Erdene Zuu Monastery at Karakorum, where he again prayed for the Bogd's good health. While in the area, Rabjaa studied the tsam mask traditions of Erdene Zuu and visited important sites including the hot springs at Khujirt and Tövkhön Monastery.

After wintering in the region, Rabjaa asked to return to Khuree for another visit with the Bogd Gegeen, thus sparking one of the more curious incidents in his life.

By the 19th century, Khuree had become a cosmopolitan city made up of Mongols, Chinese, Russians and Tibetan caravan men. Its importance as a spiritual center had been compromised by the encroachment of a Manchu trading district called Maimaicheng. Even the lamas, supposedly supported by the monasteries, became entrenched by the intrigue.[2]

Although on previous visits Rabjaa had been well received in Khuree, for some curious reason on this visit he was refused entry. He therefore instead organized a feast at the Kherlen River to the east of the city. Here he wrote a song of forgiveness to those who had banned him.

The song, called 'Not to be Mocked,' was a hymn praising the Bogd Gegeen as the 'Son of the World.' In it he appeals to the Khuree residents not to mock him, and promises to improve his behavior in future.

"Dumb to have drunk too much brandy, and therefore fallen down on the road trod by horses," he said, recalling his actions.

He then asks, "You who are angry with me, who pass your own dear life without being noticed, please forgive me."[3]

Legend offers contradictory interpretations of why he was refused a meeting with the Bogd Lama on this occasion.

One account states that the Bogd Gegeen's handlers had taken offense with Rabjaa on his previous visit because of the latter being overly drunk on his meeting with the Bogd Lama, the head of Buddhism in the country. This, they felt, was going too far. Being granted an audience with the Bogd Gegeen was an honor that should not be treated with such casual mindlessness.

The other account, which is popular in the Gobi today, claims that the Bogd Lama had offended Rabjaa by scolding him for his over indulgence in alcohol and sex, offences that could not be denied.

Gobi folk believe that the Bogd Lama died soon thereafter because of the bad karma earned from scolding Rabjaa.

His days of camping by the Kherlen River were not unproductive, however, and he composed a large number of poems during the sojourn. Many local people came for his blessing, and his lover Baljudmaa was among them.

Rabjaa wrote a love song to her on this occasion. Called 'The Clever Brown One' (*Bardan Sergelen Borigoo*), it is a favorite with Mongols today. In it he describes his sadness at seeing her go away, and his longing to join her in the great Khangai Mountains.

I want to train and ride
My proud clever brown horse,
On my own will, trotting on the
Highlands of the Khangai.

My only beloved
Departs to distant places,
Yet as clear as a mirror
Remains in my heart.

From the innermost parts of my body
Missing you,
The glorious one,
Like the spring inside a lock.

Let my wish come true:
Living together
In the beautiful peaceful emptiness
Of infinite space.[4]

Rabjaa left Khuree and wintered in Khardal Beissin Khoshuu (Sükhbaatar Aimag) before traveling back to Doloon Nuur to visit with his guru the Janjiya Khutagt.

It was during this time that Rabjaa began to suffer from an ailment of the foot. His doctors said the ailment could not be healed and might be fatal. Grief-stricken, Dadishura then made five offerings in hopes of curing her companion. After a few weeks the ailment subsided and in gratitude, Rabjaa wrote the poem 'Ulemchin Chanar' (see Chapter Seven).

In the coming year, 1841, Rabjaa announced his intentions to travel to Lhasa. He had never been farther than Amdo, an area in the northern part of Tibet. By late February he had made it to Alasha, where he stayed to celebrate the lunar New Year. During the visit he watched various tsam performances and rituals. It was here that an order came from the Janjiya Khutagt to return to his native country. Possibly because the incident came shortly after Rabjaa had been banned from traveling to Khuree, he had fallen afoul of the Gelugpa order, which may have prevented a trip to Lhasa. In any event, Rabjaa's biography mentions that, in appreciation for his visit, the people of Alasha gave him a gift of silver coins.

In 1843 Rabjaa traveled to Gurvan Galbiin Khiid, his monastery in the southern Gobi. He based himself here for several years, making only short trips outside and concentrating on the upkeep of his monasteries. In 1846, because of deteriorating health, he made a trip to the natural spring area of Hujirt.

The urge to travel struck Rabjaa again in 1853, and he left to visit several monasteries across the Gobi. At Duinkhor Temple in Khamaryn Khiid he put on a tsam performance called 'The Way to Shambhala.' Traveling eastward, he stayed with the Khardal Beis in Tsetsen Khaan Aimag. It was here that he wrote a poem about the national Naadam celebration, which was carved as wood blocks for printing.

It was also in Tsetsen Khaan Aimag that Rabjaa is believed to have written 'Completely True Views,' now thought of as one of his last great works.

The poem includes one of his signature remarks, "After with father and mother I became flesh and blood. I came with 18 years to this place. From then until today more than 40 years have passed; it really seems like magic to me."[5] In the poem, Rabjaa concludes with the following ominous lines, about traveling along the path to the underworld with the hungry ghosts.

At the moment I travel to the hungry ghosts.
You my spiritual and worldly servants who stayed back
Should live and do inner deeds that people will understand
Because what I said earlier, harmonic vows and the teaching of the lama,
These have gone away like a shadow in the evening.

Let us sing a drinking song together which pushes away the weariness,
For slowly I will follow the path and travel.
Difficult it is to go back, I hurry to go and to arrive
And have sung a song for this path![6]

In 1854 Rabjaa made one final journey to Khuree, apparently to witness the enthronement of the Seventh Bogd Gegeen.

This invitation and visit to Khuree shows that Rabjaa, in his later years, had somehow made amends with the senior officials in Khuree.

Following this trip to the capital, Rabjaa returned again to the desert by way of Erdene Zuu.

The experiences he enjoyed on these trips, the poems he wrote, and the tsam performances he witnessed and directed, would be the last ones of his life.

Chapter Eleven:
An Untimely End

Oh, I am drunk
When the hour nears, you will die within a day and a night
The body as soft as cotton and then as hard as wood
Your eyes clear as water and stiff as earth
Your belongings heaped up high as a rock
Will be covered with dust
The very dearest and closest friends turn into demons
Your serenity, burning like fire will collapse like ash…
Your fame like the wind will fade, like the rainbow
And one will throw away like an old fur
What you have treasured like gold

Danzan Rabjaa[1]

Danzan Rabjaa was still traveling and leading important Buddhist ceremonies until his death. His concise biography relates that in his final days, he was traveling south towards Inner Mongolia. He spoke with Dadishura, either on the road or at Khamaryn Khiid, and visited sacred sites and temples on the way. It is believed that his health was weak at this time, and he may have been heading for Hohhot to pray for his own sake at the Maidari Temple. He did not reach Hohhot. He got as far as a Temple known simply as 'Boin,' and died there, aged 53. The year was 1856, coincidentally the same year in which the Panchen Lama of Tibet died.

A whole list of legends and lore provides various romantic versions of how Rabjaa met his end. The stories invariably place blame on one of his rivals, including the Manchus in Peking and the Gelugpa hierarchy in Khuree. There were constant rumors that both sides were intent on assassinating him, so in order to thwart this, his followers provided a ring of security wherever he went. His libations were regularly tested for poison by pouring them into silver bowls (if the drink were contaminated the cup would turn black). Visitors to Khamaryn Khiid were always viewed with suspicion and were sometimes searched for weapons or poison.

One legend states that in 1853, Danzan Rabjaa gathered his disciples at a hill near Khamaryn Khiid and announced that he would "leave them" after three years. He ordered them to build an ovoo there and said they could always speak to him at this place, which he dubbed 'Shambhala,' the term used to define the mythical Buddhist kingdom. True to his word, Rabjaa passed three years later. All the Mongolian versions of the death agree that he was poisoned, but few can agree as to who gave the poison, or why.

The historian Ts. Damdinsuren collected some of the more interesting versions of Rabjaa's death on his research trips to the Gobi Desert in the 1960s. These were later edited and updated by D. Tsagaan in her book *Rabjaagiin Yaruu Nairgiin Zokhioliin Toim.* The scholars guessed that Rabjaa's killer could have been the Gelugpa monks of Khuree, a prince in Inner Mongolia, or even Dadishura. All of these could have been jealous of Rabjaa in some way. The most popular story involves the second wife of the Gobi Mergen Van, a practitioner of black magic named Shuluum Avai (this combination of words loosely translates to Devil's Wife). Because Rabjaa had long avoided her advances, Shuluum decided death was the best thing for him. Thus she gave seven bottles of vodka to a certain Luvson with instructions to deliver them as a gift to Rabjaa. One bottle contained poison. Luvson was given 50 lang to fulfill the mission. Rabjaa had expected a visitor to arrive ". . . wearing a goatskin jacket and riding atop a black camel." He told his disciples to greet such a visitor warmly.

Days later, Luvson arrived in the exact manner that Rabjaa had predicted. "You merely took fifty lang from Shuluum Avai. But it is I who has known five lives. So is it you who should drink? Or I?" Rabjaa asked.

Luvson was too afraid to answer. How could Rabjaa have known about the money? He began to wail with grief and then confessed to his crime.

"I will drink to fulfill the dreams of others," said Rabjaa. "Evil people have wealthy aims. This is the one law of the poor universe."[2]

Rabjaa did indeed drink the poison.

If he knew that the vodka contained poison then he committed suicide, which is what many scholars believe.

After Rabjaa drank this poison, and realized he would soon die, he sat down to write the poem, *Yertons Avgain Jam Khemekh Orshiv* (Law of the Universe Lady). This poem is a highly abstract and negative view of life, condemning and cursing the world as meaningless, dishonest and sinful. He further calls the world an evil monster that is capable of killing and eating anything.

The poem contains verses on emptiness, lamenting that the world is a dreamy void where death is inevitable, a place where the cries of the suffering are ignored. His words do not show anger, but rather an understanding of the nature of the world. The poem is his parting advice to his disciples, that one should not seek happiness in the world. It reflects the Buddhist belief that only when a person can overcome suffering will they be able to follow the path to enlightenment. It reads in part as follows:

Universe lady, to you
Let me give you simple jokes.
To you with changeable manner,
There is nothing interesting in you.

You spiteful Universe lady,
I am giving you one nickname,
'Perfect pure vow Universe,'
Who contradicted Buddha himself.

Lazy sleeping world,
Lost from power or strength of truth,
You disturb all spirituality.

Truly deceitful world,
Which isn't there when one sees it;
Crazily screaming world,
Which fades while one listens.

Prodigal and foolish world,
Becomes wrong while you think of it.
Uncompassionate gluttonous world,
Not satisfied with what it has.

Unwise sleeping world,
Never waking.
Unmerciful killing and eating,
Most terrible monster world.

Changeable in speed,
Deceitful and slippery world.
Completely naïve,
Losing and wicked world.

Being friends from the early ages,
Disguised world.
Earnestly urging without fail,
Devil's leg world.

Hiding your fault and being spiteful,
But having sickness in your abdomen.
Universe lady, to you
I will offer you simple jokes

Dear world, you think
You are nice?
I am drunk and I have free time
Let me present an interesting anecdote

Disagreeable Universe
For it's impossible to be disciplined
Universe burned with pride
For it's impossible to gain success

The world with attachment and passion
Never tired of tricking
Female unstable Universe you are
For you get upset when I say the truth[3]

The poem concludes with the line, "I am hurt in this world, so I became a scoundrel. My poor father, these are the words of my sincere heart."

The 'Law of the Universe Lady' was supposedly written just after Rabjaa swallowed fatal poison, so one cannot guess the emotions coursing through him as he wrote these lines. His previous critical works had been directed to different elements of society - lamas, aristocrats and others - rather than all-encompassing references to the world as a whole. Yet on his deathbed there was simply no single person worthy of his emotions, which were instead directed at the world itself.

In this poem, we see that when Rabjaa chose to leave this world he was attached not to its beauty but to its worst qualities. It is in fact a very intimate poem as it shows a strong attachment, almost marriage, between the world and Rabjaa.

This relationship gave Rabjaa life. It led him through a difficult childhood, took away his parents when he was young, and it put him into constant conflict with authority.

The world prematurely killed his predecessors, and he predicted that it would kill the Noyon Khutagts that would follow him.

In the end, the world also took his life from him, as he expected it someday would.

Rabjaa's corpse was returned to Khamaryn Khiid and left in the hands of Balchinchoijoo, a high ranking lama and a man of noble blood. Balchinchoijoo swore an oath to protect the relics of Rabjaa, the words of which are still preserved on a wall hanging at the Danzanravjaa Museum in Sainshand: "Since Master Bogdo Chingis Khaan became Heaven and bid farewell, his faithful Bo'orchu became the protector. Since beloved Noyon Khutagt entered Nirvana and bid farewell, I Balchinchoijoo, became the protector of his temple."

Bo'orchu, as mentioned in the *Secret History of the Mongols*, was Chingis Khaan's trusted assistant from a young age. When Chingis died, he took the role of caretaker for the great Khaan's most valued possessions. Balchinchoijoo likewise saw himself as the *takhilch* (protector, curator or trustee) for Rabjaa. The oath further affirmed three promises. The first, that items from Khamaryn Khiid were not personal property, they belonged to all Mongolians. The second promise held that the items could never leave Mongolia. The third promise affirmed that the takhilch was ultimately responsible for the objects.

Following Rabjaa's death, Balchinchoijoo's first task was to oversee the embalming and mummification of the monk – a rare funeral rite reserved for khutagts and other high incarnates. High lamas were commonly cremated. Their ashes were buried in holy sites or sometimes mixed with dough and turned into altar statues.

After a khutagt dies, the body is left seated in the formal posture of meditation, with legs crossed, right arm raised and holding a special item like a prayer bell or peacock feather. The body is then prepared for cremation, but when mummification is in order, the embalming takes place the following day. First the skin is rubbed with perfume and oil. Then a compound containing salt, juniper and other preservatives is applied. The skin is then pricked with a needle to allow the preservatives to seep into the body.

Following this, the entire corpse is covered with a mound of salt and left to dry for two months. The next step is to clean off the compound, dress the Khutagt and decorate the face with gilt. The mummy, called a *sharil*, is then enshrined within a stupa or placed inside a temple where it can be worshipped.

Rabjaa's mummified body was placed inside his famous White Temple, which only Balchinchoijoo was permitted to enter. The White Temple became known as the 'Mummy Temple' and its doors were open to the public for a special viewing on just one day each year. Why would the lamas place Rabjaa in the White Temple, alongside 150 boxes filled with relics, artwork and books? It was said that local Manchu overlords sought to destroy Rabjaa's artifacts to erase his legacy. The clergy at Khamaryn Khiid, however, knew that even the Manchus would never destroy a tomb or grave; thus, placing the corpse in the same room with his belongings would protect both his body and his relics.

The responsibility of Danzan Rabjaa's takhilch was to be passed onto the descendants of Balchinchoijoo, whether they were monk or layman. Balchinchoijoo had a large birthmark on his back and it was said that future curators would bear a similar mark.

Balchinchoijoo died in 1865. However, his duties had already been taken over by his son Gan-Ochir (1837-1889), who assumed the role of *takhilch* at the age of twenty-five. Gan-Ochir had been groomed for this position from a young age (having also been born with the auspicious birthmark) and spent his youth studying Danzan Rabjaa's writings, poetry and teachings under the guidance of his father.

Naria, Gan-Ochir's son, assumed the role of the third curator. He was followed by his son Ongoi, who served until 1931. However, it was actually Ongoi's brother Gombo who performed most of the curatorial duties at this time. Tuduv was the fifth curator until his death in 1990; his fate will be discussed in the next chapter. Each of these trustees underwent a similar education, each being taught by their father about the rich heritage of Danzan Rabjaa. Each studied Rabjaa's works and, importantly, the significance of the relics that he left behind. While little is known of their activities, it is believed that both Ongoi and Gombo played an important role in protecting Rabjaa's belongings during the chaotic era that followed the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in 1911. At one point, with Kuomintang forces threatening monasteries in the Gobi, Ongoi and Gombo ordered an evacuation of the

White Temple, successfully moving hundreds of crates filled with relics into the Gobi Desert on the backs of sturdy camels.

During the time of these trustees, two more Noyon Khutagts were brought to Khamaryn Khiid, and both bore a tragic story. Following the death of Rabjaa, the Manchurians proclaimed that all future Noyon Khutagts must be found in Tibet. This was common practice used to undermine their power. The same law had applied to the Bogd Gegeens, after the second Bogd (a Mongolian) had attempted to lead a revolt against the Manchus. After that all Bogd Gegeens were brought from Tibet to weaken alliances and create friction within the Mongolian hierarchy.

The Sixth Noyon Khutagt was named Luvson Dambi Jantzen Odser. He was born in Tibet, the son of a certain Myagmar, and grew up within the Gelugpa yellow hat tradition. He was actually the younger brother of the Seventh Bogd Gegeen. So illegitimate was this 'reincarnation' that he was actually born a year before Danzan Rabjaa died. He was taken to Peking for further schooling and Manchu indoctrination, to be used as a puppet in the Gobi. At the age of 14, he was sent to Khamaryn Khiid with sixty Tibetan families. But the monks, chaffed to be led by a foreigner, called the boy a heretic. He received a poor education and it's likely that he was beaten. In return, the Sixth Khutagt condemned his predecessor and ordered the destruction of his artwork and literature. This, clearly, did not sit well with Rabjaa's friends and disciples. He managed six years at Khamaryn Khiid before he was poisoned.

"After that the people chose a *real* khutagt," the current curator Altangerel explained.

Following the assassination of the young Tibetan, negotiations were carried out to allow the Seventh Noyon Khutagt to be born in Mongolia. It is unclear, however, how long this process took and when precisely the Seventh Khutagt was born. Historians write that he was born in 1875 or 1876. However, other evidence suggests he was not born until 1891. This is based on a 1931 official document stating that the Seventh Khutagt was 40 years old at that time. (It is possible that this document was mistaken). Whichever the year of his birth, the fact that he was allowed to assume the role as the Seventh Khutagt was important for the morale of the people in Gobi Mergen Van Khoshuu. His mother was Tserendejid (nicknamed Jinje) and he allegedly had very clear signs of being a khutagt. At his ordination, he was granted the name, Agvan Luvson Dambi Jantzen Jampts.

As the Seventh Khutagt grew older he became a popular figure and traveled widely from Peking to Khuree. Legend has it that he also went to Lhasa and India, although this is probably untrue. He was known for putting on great feasts, punctuated with heavy bouts of drinking, and for promoting horse racing and the arts.

After the crisis of the Sixth Khutagt, Rabjaa's theater was finally revived, and the Seventh was respected for continuing Danzan Rabjaa's work. He was very interested in theater himself and personally directed springtime performances of *Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo*. In order to raise funds for the play he even set up a financial department at Khamaryn Khiid, which collected money for the opera.

To improve acting skills he pumped money into the drama school set up by the Fifth Khutagt. The drama company had, however, fallen off somewhat from Danzan Rabjaa's day. The length of the opera was shortened from one month to around two weeks, ending the story at the time of Nomun-Bayasgalant's birth. The number of actors, musicians and crew was also cut by half. But the people living around the area were satisfied and convinced that this was a true incarnation of Danzan Rabjaa.

There exists one myth, perhaps based on fact, related to the life of the Seventh. It is said that around 1910 there lived in the Gobi an insane brother and sister, the children of a certain Ja Getsul. The pair acted strangely when visitors came to their ger, often stripping down to their undergarments and fondling each other. Their family members knew this and tied them up. Nonetheless, the Gobi people avoided this particular ger.

One time the Seventh Noyon Khutagt came to the ger. When the siblings saw him they were overcome with such fright that they ran away into the desert and died soon after. Gobi people believe that the brother and sister were in fact reincarnations of Luvson and Shuluum Avai, and they were born insane as "payment" for killing Danzan Rabjaa. This was why they had so feared the seventh incarnation.[4]

◆

Life for the Seventh Khutagt changed radically in the 1920s when Mongolia was overrun by Communism. Communist oppression increased during the late 1920s, and personal properties were confiscated. Many families began to flee across the borders into Inner Mongolia, Tuva and Russia.

The persecution at Danzan Rabjaa's Khamaryn Khiid was the same as anywhere else. Livestock was confiscated and limits were placed on the number of lamas and their activities.

In 1931, over 300 lamas from Khamaryn Khiid were arrested for "counter-revolutionary activities" and were taken to Ulaanbaatar. Their fate is not known but it is likely that they were either executed or died in labor camps. Among those arrested was the curator Ongoi and the 40-year-old Seventh Noyon Khutagt.

The official responsible for the Khutagt's arrest was, like Danzan Rabjaa's killer, named Luvson.

Luvson ordered the immediate removal of all property owned by the Seventh Khutagt. His investigation was well documented in a series of reports, which ran in parts as follows:

> I thought they (the Seventh Khutagt and an aristocrat named Baljinyam) were very strange. But they knew what they were doing. They secretly divided their possessions among their followers, who hid their treasure and distributed their livestock. Because of our work, the people did not like our office. They said we are slaves and beggars to the government. Some people cursed the officials, others feigned suicide, some tried blackmail and bribes, still others said they would seek revenge. But the Seventh Khutagt and Baljinyam were not such people, they were very calm.
>
> The Seventh Khutagt was 40 years old. . . . When we met him we announced that we would take his property and he did not protest, saying he knew of this before. "Good deeds and sin, happiness and suffering all have their time. Now the time changes for me. I have some property but I don't know where it all is. . . . Perhaps others can benefit from this property. I have two adopted daughters and you can decide what to leave them, I only request that you leave me my vodka and tobacco," the Khutagt said.
>
> After we collected the Khutagt's livestock along with his precious artifacts, a district official said that many more valuables were hidden in the ground. We accused the Khutagt of this and interrogated him about the whereabouts of the property.
>
> He said, "I hid nothing, and as I told you I do not know how much property I have nor where it is. . . . I actually do

> not oppose your government. People know that every year I willingly gave forty horses to the army in Zamyn Uud. Now I want to leave the monastery and join the army."
>
> Then, as before, he asked in a friendly tone, "My son, I have no regrets about my property, but I regret that I don't have my *arkhi*." And he asked me to bring him some.
>
> I reported this conversation to the district head and he allowed me to give one kettle of vodka from the Khutagt's supply. The Khutagt drank the entire kettle and then laid down in a very happy state.
>
> He then said, "If I hid any property I would tell you, but I didn't hide anything. . . . " Then he asked for more *arkhi*.
>
> I returned the next day and gave him two kettles, and on the third day I gave three as the district head allowed. This official said if we didn't give the Khutagt *arkhi* he would die there. I had never seen any person whose life was sustained by alcohol, I had never met such a person before or after.
>
> The Khutagt spent ten days in prison and was then taken to Ulaanbaatar via Khentii. Because of his great girth, he was unable to ride a horse, so he was taken on a cart. . . .
>
> The Fifth Khutagt was a drunk. This is why he was given names such as the 'Crazy Noyon Khutagt' and the 'Horrible Saint.' He grew infamous by these names. I have heard the legends told by local people about how the Fifth Khutagt predicted that the Sixth would live for a short time and that the Seventh would be like himself, a drunkard. The legend says that there will be no more Noyon Khutagts after the Seventh is gone. We all know that the Fifth Khutagt was a famous man of culture and a great poet. We still sing the songs he composed and know of the drama 'Saran Khökhöö,' which he directed.
>
> I doubt that the Noyon Khutagt could predict the life of his reincarnations. But in any case, I have seen that the Seventh incarnation was a drunk with no bounds.[5]

It's likely that the Seventh Khutagt was shot dead and buried in a mass grave on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, as was the fate of many monks at the time. According to a new law, the recognition of a khutagt was not permitted. While the Gobi people had heard this before the proclamation this time was coming not from Peking, but from the Mongolian capital Ulaanbaatar.

The incarnations of Yansang Yidam that had spanned hundreds years had come to an abrupt end.

It is interesting to note that five Noyon Khutagts in a row were either murdered or committed suicide. The Third and Fourth were executed by the Manchus in Peking, the Fifth seems to have committed suicide, the Sixth was killed by the Khamaryn Khiid lamas and the Seventh by the Mongolian Communists. It was by no means a golden era.

Even though history writes that the line ended with the Seventh Khutagt, there was in fact a secret Eighth Noyon Khutagt. The story begins in 1930, when hundreds of Mongolians were escaping to China because of Communist repression. Gendensaivan, an assistant to the Seventh Noyon Khutagt, fled to the Xillin Gol area of Inner Mongolia. Gendensaivan, the great uncle of the museum curator Z. Altangerel, learned the following year that the Seventh Khutagt had been arrested and was presumed dead. He took it upon himself to find a reincarnation, as none was allowed in Outer Mongolia. Gendensaivon's search ended when he found a child named Samdan Jampts. He selected this child as the Eighth Noyon Khutagt because it was said that the baby cried for three days after his birth. He refused to drink milk and only stopped crying when his mother offered a taste of vodka. The baby drank it, and was recognized as a reincarnation of a "drunk khutagt." Because of Communist oppression in Mongolia, both the boy and Gendensaivan remained in Xillin Gol. Today, Outer Mongolians do not consider Samdan Jampts to be a bona fide khutagt because he never received ordination at Khamaryn Khiid.

Continuing the trend of tragic deaths, the Eighth Khutagt also died at an early age. In 1945, Mongolia's leader Choibalsan sent his army into China, creating a battleground in Inner Mongolia. His mission was to reclaim the lost province from the Japanese as his share of war spoils at the end of World War II. The troops, however, were held back and then retreated after a strong rebuke from the Soviet Union. In the midst of this brief invasion, dozens of Inner Mongolian monasteries were plundered by Chinese troops, including Xillin Tsagaan Ovoonii Khiid, the monastery that housed the 12-year-old Eighth Noyon Khutagt. The circumstances behind his death are unclear, but it is rumored that he was shot and killed during one of these raids.[6]

A year after the arrest of the Seventh Noyon Khutagt, northern Mongolia erupted into civil war as lamas rebelled against the Communist government. It was a short but bloody campaign that saw great losses on both sides. After a brief period of peace, violence erupted again in 1937 with the great purge, ending in the death of around 28,000 people and the destruction of around 700 monasteries. Thousands of others were sent to Siberia to work in gulags. By the end of 1938, there was little left to recall Mongolia's great Buddhist heritage.

In the spring of 1937 the Soviet Red Army Unit #17 established a base near Sainshand. One year later, the army unit set up a second position near the still active Khamaryn Khiid. Tuduv, the *takhilch* at the time, began to organize the secret evacuation of the White Temple. Wood crates filled with artwork and other valuable items were assembled, and each night for two months he repeated the process of hauling the crates from the temple to secret hiding places in the desert. At times he had the assistance of a camel but most of the work was done alone, walking anywhere from two to ten kilometers each night. Tuduv memorized the locations of the boxes and the items in each one. Sutras, statues, paintings, text books, gold and silver jewelry, theater costumes, pens, hats, bowls, vases, weapons, medicine and personal items belonging to Rabjaa were placed in the ground. Yet, because of the massive amount of relics, he could only save less than half before Unit #17 descended on the temple, forcing him to abandon his work. If the time and resources had been available, Tuduv said, 150 boxes would have been buried.

In June 1938, the remaining lamas at Khamaryn Khiid were arrested and jailed in Sainshand. The monastery was destroyed in August, the temples and theaters being stripped for usable items and then burnt to the ground. One hundred and sixty monks were shot, and about 300 others remained in jail.[7] Only the youngest lamas were free to join the army, become herders or join a cooperative.

The treasures of Khamaryn Khiid, those not salvaged by Lama Tuduv, were gathered together and burnt. Like all other monasteries, the valuable gold and silver objects were sent to the Soviet Union.

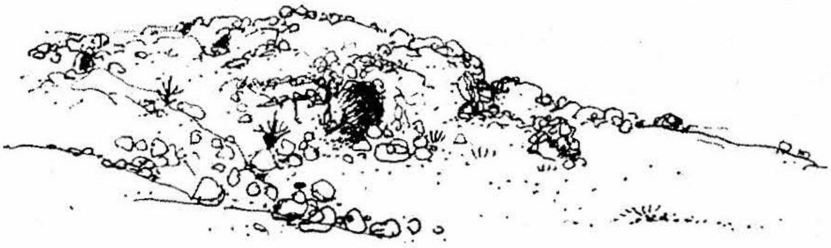
Stone blocks were taken from the temples and used to make new buildings in the nearby town of Orgon. Some blocks were used to construct an auto garage in Sainshand; a few found their way to the town square, where they were fitted into the ground in front of the MPRP headquarters (where they still lie today).

The last decision the lamas made prior to their arrest was what to do with Danzan Rabjaa's mummified body. Still sealed up in its honored place inside the White Temple, the monks knew full well that it would soon be desecrated. Some wanted to bury it, but at last it was decided that the mummy should be burned. The ashes and bone fragments were saved by Lama Tuduv and are now on display the Danzanravjaa Museum.

Lama Tuduv barely managed to escape the carnage at Khamaryn Khiid. He ran off into the desert until he reached the ger of his sister, where he remained to begin a new life as a herder. The years went by and Tuduv had one daughter with a local woman and an adopted son.

He did not tell his family about the boxes he had buried, in the hope that, one day, the nightmare of Communism would end and that the monastery could be restored as the lamas had predicted. But no one in the world knew of this.

Danzan Rabjaa was all but forgotten.



Danzan Rabjaa's meditation cave near Khamaryn Khiid

Chapter Twelve: Rabjaa Resurrected

In the late 1950s, purely by chance, there was a renewed interest in the story of the forgotten monk. It was Ts. Damdinsuren, a well-known scholar, writer and professor of history and literature at Mongolian National University, who took an interest in Danzan Rabjaa.

Damdinsuren's adventure began in 1959 when he was leafing through some old textbooks at Gandan Monastery, the only Buddhist sanctuary left open under the Communist regime. He had only come by chance, as he was guiding some foreign tourists around the grounds.

While in the monastery library, he stumbled across ten volumes of *The Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo*. Some of the volumes were doubles, and chapters one, three and five were missing, so the text was far from complete.

The discovery of *The Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo*, however, was actually nothing out of the ordinary. Many copies of this old Tibetan play existed. Sayabadar, a herder from the Gobi Desert, had brought these volumes to Gandan Monastery, where a clerk filed them away. But after reading a few pages of the text Damdinsuren realized this manuscript was unique. The text included stage directions as though it were a script for a play or opera. Further, another volume, dated 1902, was soon located, but this was filled solely with stage directions. This was not the Inner Mongolian or Tibetan version Damdinsuren had seen before. It was a fragment of Danzan Rabjaa's own play.

At that time it was not known if Danzan Rabjaa had ever put on a performance, so effective had the Communist government been in erasing his legacy. There had been many rumors but no proof had been found, until Damdinsuren's discovery.

Spurred on by this find, Damdinsuren became obsessed with learning more about the Fifth Khutagt, a historical figure whom his colleagues had dubbed "the drunken God of the Gobi Desert."

Damdinsuren soon became the pre-eminent researcher on the subject, writing about Rabjaa's mysterious and unique lifestyle. In 1961, after much research, he wrote down twenty of Rabjaa's songs that had previously only been recorded orally.

As for understanding the history of Danzan Rabjaa himself, Damdinsuren used a copy of the biography that had been found in 1952. It was believed that this text had been based on an autobiography, since it often speaks in the first person. He published a new biography on Rabjaa's life in 1962, and his lectures and reports soon changed the shady way in which Communist ideologues viewed the monk.

Rabjaa was no longer considered a feudal relic, but was now viewed as having been a great writer and social critic.

Damdinsuren began conducting interviews with elderly scholars and lamas, and learned that *The Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo* had been widely performed in different Mongolian monasteries even long after Rabjaa's death. One 67-year-old former monk named Renchindorj said he had seen the opera twice when he was 18 or 19 in the area of present day Dornogobi, which would have been around the year 1911.

In April 1960 the Mongolian Academy of Sciences lent Damdinsuren a Russian Jeep Gaz-69 so that he could travel to Sainshand, Khövsgöl sum and other places associated with Rabjaa's life, for the purposes of conducting research. His mission was to find the missing volumes of the opera. On the way he met former monks who said they had seen it performed when they were young. There was even a rumor that a famous *The Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo* actress was still alive somewhere in northern Mongolia. Some of those interviewed were able to describe the costumes, the plot of the play, some of the action and perhaps recite a few lines of a song from the opera.

Finding the missing volumes of the opera proved to be one of the most challenging parts of his research. "It was like searching for a pearl in a field," he wrote.

On several occasions Damdinsuren was led to remote parts of the desert, based on advice or tips he had received from colleagues. There, they said, he would find an old person who had in his possession copies of the play. The information was often misleading. Damdinsuren spent days searching for herders who, when he met them, reported not having any lost manuscripts.

At last he met Damdarjaa, a worker at an oil well in Zuunbayan sum, who had a copy of the third volume. Soon after he met a school teacher named Zanabazar who offered him a special edition of the second volume. This volume contained the lines of just two characters, and appeared to be a script for the opera.

Damdinsuren then came across the mother of all finds when he met an old blacksmith named Balbar, nicknamed "Fat Baval," who lived southwest of the oil field. Balbar was able to produce the first, third and fifth volumes of *The Life Story of the Moon Cuckoo*.

So happy was Damdinsuren at having finally collected the whole opera, and so impressed was he with Balbar, that the former took the time to pen his own poem dedicated to the blacksmith. It reads as follows:

I heard about the great poet
I started the journey to find his poems
Across the oasis
I went further
I arrived at the home of Balbar the blacksmith
And I stayed there

Balbar the blacksmith
I saw him using his hammer
Then he opened his special box
He removed from it carefully wrapped books

Among the books I found the poems I sought
I found the Noyon Khutagt's literature works
I admire the peaceful blacksmith
Who had that special box full of books
In his ten strong fingers

There is knowledge in the harsh Gobi
There is wisdom in the old man
There are books in the special box
These should not be neglected

The difficulties in conducting this research are described in Damdinsuren's book *Mongoliin Uran Zokhioliin Ov Ulamjaliin Asuudaluud* (*Problems of Traditional Heritage in Mongolian Literature*). The story explains how in the course of his journey, he heard about a certain Agvanzundui, who had apparently had a part of the *Saran Khökhöö* play. After searching for some time, it became clear that Agvanzundui had died, but just before his death he had buried his cache of Buddhist treasures in the desert. Further questioning proved that a girl called

Tsetseg had helped to bury the chests. Damdinsuren succeeded in locating Tsetseg and she agreed to help find the chests. Damdinsuren then borrowed a Jeep from the director of the nearby oil drilling station (he doesn't say what had happened to his own Jeep) and organized a team to hunt for the chests.

The team included the school teacher Zanabazar, three students, a railway worker named Gombo, Tsetseg and four others, all crammed into the five-seat Jeep. Following the instructions of Tsetseg, the team set out for a place called Shar Dov, where the boxes would be found in a three or four square meter spot, "between two bushes."

"We left at 3pm and drove 70 kilometers through sand," Damdinsuren wrote. "We arrived at Shar Dov and started digging, but since we only had a couple of shovels we worked in five-minute shifts. We dug until 9pm and a nearby herder named Shorhon gave us food. The next morning we started digging at 6am and worked until 9pm, of course it was exhausting. We dug six feet into the ground, the area was about the size of a ger, but we found nothing. This was very discouraging, so we stopped."

Later in the spring, Damdinsuren writes, Zanabazar took it upon himself to return to the site, this time with a local elder. "The old man had an iron rod and he hit the ground with it. If the earth was very hard he knew it had not been disturbed. But if it was soft he said that the boxes may have been buried on that spot. So they searched in this way and found two boxes. "This old man was uneducated but wise because of the experiences that life had given him. He had the wisdom of ten men," Damdinsuren wrote. Although the boxes did contain important Buddhist relics and books, it did not contain any volumes of *Saran Khökhöö*.

Although the events of this field trip had already been in published by Damdinsuren, this still did not stop others from conjuring up their own version of the adventure. J. Zundui was one of the three students on the expedition; he recorded his thoughts in 2003 for a newspaper to promote the 200th anniversary of Danzan Rabjaa's birth. He was fourteen at the time and said the expedition occurred in July 1957 (Damdinsuren recorded the date as April 1960). Despite this, he said he had met Damdinsuren while he was in the process of interviewing some of the elders.

> Most of them were very scared and didn't talk too much, so Damdinsuren greeted them with a silk khadak and 25

> tögrögs, which was a lot at that time," Zundui recalled. "Then we heard about an old man who had buried some boxes in the ground. We found his granddaughter who had helped him. She said she was 38 years old. She took us to the place where she thought the boxes were buried, we set up three gers for our own use, and we started to dig. However, it was very sandy and it seemed that whatever we dug up just fell right back in the hole. This digging went on for five days, then on the sixth day a local family told us about an old temple that was 20 kilometers away. We found the ruins of this old temple and decided to dig there; it was a nice place with bushes and water. We dug about two meters into the ground and found a blue silk scarf. Then we found three boxes wrapped up in a *khadak*, it was very exciting. The next morning we laid out some cloth and opened these finely painted boxes; there we found the third, fourth, fifth and sixth volumes of the play that Damdinsuren was looking for. Damdinsuren was so happy, he was holding the boxes and jumping up and down.[1]

We can probably assume that Damdinsuren's version was more accurate. In either case, the professor's mission was complete; he had collected all the volumes of *Saran Khökhöö*, several poems and many stories about Danzan Rabjaa. Damdinsuren launched his mission to popularize Danzan Rabjaa and in 1961 published an article on the poet in *Culture and Literature* newspaper. A year later he published a book containing Danzan Rabjaa's *Saran Khökhöö* along with detailed notes on its stage direction. He and his pupil D. Tsagaan then set about editing the many poems they had converted into the Cyrillic script. By 1968 they had published 170 different poems, songs and surgaals that were originally written in Mongolian script and 180 pieces originally written in Tibetan script. They continued to piece together Danzan Rabjaa's biography, which was no easy task, since at least three versions existed. One copy had been brought to Gandan Monastery in 1959 by an anonymous man and given to Jambal, a lama in residence there. A second copy had been in the possession of the lama Gombo from Sainshand and a third had been held by the previously mentioned blacksmith Balbar.

Another problem Damdinsuren and Tsagaan continually faced was determining the original language of the poetry, as Danzan Rabjaa wrote in both Tibetan and Mongol. 'Shame and Shame,' 'Perfect Quality' and 'The Kite' were a few of the poems for which the researchers could not determine the original language. They also found that Rabjaa had transliterated some of his Mongolian poems into Tibetan script so Tibetans could read the words even if they could not understand them.

◆

During this time Lama Tuduv must surely have heard about Damdinsuren's investigation, but showed amazing resilience in maintaining his secret. As early as 1960 Damdinsuren mentioned having known that Tuduv was one of the old monks who might have information about Danzan Rabjaa, but Tuduv managed to avoid meeting with the professor. He believed secrecy was still the best way to protect his hidden boxes.

Lama Tuduv had a wife, a daughter and an adopted son, but he had said nothing to them with regard to the boxes. The secret was his alone but he hoped the Communist storm would soon pass and that the secret could be revealed. However, as the years went by the situation remained unchanged and Tuduv worried that he would have no heir to carry on the tradition of the *takhilch.* A fortuitous event then occurred.

Tuduv's daughter and her husband were at this time living in Ulaanbaatar. The daughter gave birth to a boy at Ulaanbaatar's Maternity Ward #2 and named him Altangerel. He would be the third of ten children. The mother noticed a large birthmark on the back her newborn child, and knew that her father bore a similar birthmark. She saw this as an auspicious sign, and immediately contacted Dornogobi Province to alert her father of the arrival of her son and the strange birthmark on his body.

When Tuduv heard the news he traveled straight away to Ulaanbaatar and the maternity ward where his daughter and grandson were recuperating. Having inspected the birthmark on the baby boy, Tuduv believed that this child could be groomed to one day take his place as takhilch. Explaining to his daughter that he wanted a child to keep as company he asked that when the boy was old enough he be sent to stay with him in the Gobi.

When Altangerel was still a small child, Tuduv took him to the Gobi and raised him according to the prescribed traditions of the *takhilch*. However, since Khamaryn Khiid no longer existed and Buddhism was banned under the law, Altangerel's education would be made in secret. He would not have the benefit of openly studying Rabjaa's works or researching the relics left behind in the "White Temple." Everything he would learn would be passed by word of mouth from his grandfather Tuduv.

When Altangerel was old enough, Tuduv took him out to the desert to describe the location of the chests that he had buried. There were sixty-four crates in seventeen different locations and Altangerel was forced to memorize them all. If he forgot, Tuduv showed him a way to locate the boxes by using the light from the full moon on the 15th day of the middle month of the lunar year. Over the years, Tuduv and Altangerel opened each box to study their contents. Altangerel had to memorize the details of each item and recite them back to his grandfather.

Each of the seventeen locations contained three or four boxes. Tuduv and Altangerel dedicated at least one week to the process of excavation, research and re-burial of the crates. Some of the items were brought back to their ger so that Altangerel could study them at night. Other herders in the area knew that Tuduv was privately training Altangerel to be a lama, although they knew nothing of the secret crates.

As the crates were re-packaged, Tuduv showed Altangerel traditional methods of preservation. Metal items, for example, were smeared with horse fat to prevent corrosion. Tuduv even went to the extreme measure of breaking down the crates themselves so that the wood slats could be boiled in horse fat, thus ensuring their longevity. When the boxes were put back together, a sack of dung ash was left at the bottom and top of the crate to absorb moisture. Each crate was then placed in a leather sack which was sewn together; the seams were sealed with a mixture of resin and ash. Just before the last opening was sewn shut, a flame was placed inside the sack to displace the oxygen. When the crate was entombed, wood poles were placed around it in the shape of a teepee, forming a protective barrier against moisture that might seep through the earth.

Tuduv regaled Altangerel with the myths and legends of Danzan Rabjaa and forced his grandson to recite long passages of text written by Rabjaa. He brought six former lamas to visit them and help Altangerel understand Buddhist philosophy, meditation and yoga. Tuduv also instructed Altangerel how to read and write in both Tibetan and the traditional Mongol script (which had been phased out by the government from the 1930s - 1950s), so that he could properly study Rabjaa's works if the boxes were ever uncovered.

Tuduv brought Altangerel very close. He taught him the things he needed to know and most importantly how to keep his word. It was not a normal relationship between grandfather and grandchild, it was one of teacher and student, said Danzan Rabjaa scholar and Altangerel's long-time colleague G. Tsagaanderem.[2]

Otgonasan, a relative of Altangerel, described how his own family was suspicious of Tuduv's family. "They were very strange, they never moved their ger. When the other herders were moving around in search of better grassland they just stayed in the same place. In 1990 we learned why they acted in this way; they were just staying near all those buried boxes. They kept their secret and protected Danzan Rabjaa's belongings, but at the time it was very unusual,"[3] Otgonasan said.

Altangerel will be the first to admit that he did not have an ordinary childhood. As a non-person for most of his youth, Altangerel grew up in a cocoon of religion and history.

"I was a hidden child. If someone came to our ger I had to stay in the storage tent until they left. I was very quiet even into adulthood. I didn't talk to anyone. I learned from my grandfather control exercises and how to concentrate,"[4] Altangerel said.

Altangerel remembers his grandfather as a strict disciplinarian who filled his childhood with studies, hardship and labor. Altangerel was required to wake up early each morning to recite prayers. After his chores of collecting dung, cleaning the ger and preparing the fire, Altangerel was allowed breakfast, which consisted of one cup of tea and one biscuit. For lunch he was granted one bowl of rice and for dinner one bowl of meat. When he was seven, Altangerel was allowed to attend boarding school in Sainshand where he was given more food, but in summer he returned to his grandfathers' ger and the hated food rations.

As an example of Lama Tudev's demeanor, Altangerel recalls one incident that occurred during his teenage years.

Tuduv had run into some trouble with the law after performing illegal Buddhist rituals. He was arrested and ordered to spend three days in the local prison in Sainshand. When Altangerel learned of this he was overjoyed at being allowed time away from his grandfather and celebrated by eating a one months' supply of food. Tuduv beat him severely when he returned from prison.

Such a beating, however, was not uncommon. Tuduv beat his grandson for the slightest offense and forced him to perform cruel tasks, such as carrying a sack of sharp stones on his bare back over long distances.

For further punishment, Tuduv forced his grandson to sleep in a cemetery, a taboo place for Mongolians and a frightening experience for any child. Altangerel now believes that there was a reason for this hardship. He states that Tuduv challenged him as preparation for the trials of life and the difficulties that would come with being a bona fide *takhilch*.

Tuduv and Altangerel suffered one major setback during those years. In 1969 a herder grazing his cattle found some of the crates that had been hidden in a cave. When the herder reported the find to the authorities, policemen and officials were deployed to investigate the site. Several crates filled with priceless relics were unearthed and burned in a great pyre. Young Altangerel and his grandfather watched all of this from a distance, careful not to interfere.

"If we had protested, we would have been arrested and interrogated. They could have forced us to give up all the boxes. There were already rumors that our family was hiding a cache of Buddhist objects, so we didn't want to make the situation worse,"[5] said Altangerel.

Because Tuduv had the relics catalogued, he knew what was lost; the cache included manuscripts, 20 dels, hats and masks and some stage decorations, including a fake tree and horse. How odd it must have been for the officials to dig up theater props from the Gobi sands; and how heartbreaking it must have been for Altangerel and Tuduv to watch them go up in flames.

When Altangerel was 20-years old he began his compulsory military service. He arranged it so that he would be stationed in Sainshand and was assigned as a truck driver, which allowed him some opportunities to secretly meet with this grandfather. In 1984, Tuduv was ready to pass the torch of takhilch to his grandson. Together they rode horses into the Khar Uul Mountains and there Tuduv made Altangerel swear an oath to protect the legacy of Danzan Rabjaa, just as he had done at the age of twenty-four. A special snuff bottle was passed from grandfather to grandson, marking the auspicious occasion. At that moment, Altangerel recalls, his grandfather apologized for having made his life so difficult, explaining that such methods were necessary to prepare him for the challenges ahead. Tuduv told him to keep the boxes safe until better times and to train his own son to become a takhilch.

One year later, Altangerel left the army and began coursework at the Ulaanbaatar Pedagogical Institute, where he trained to be a history teacher.[6]

Meanwhile, Damdinsuren kept hot on the trail of Danzan Rabjaa from a more academic standpoint. He and Tuduv first met in 1976, but no mention of the crates was made for another nine years. By 1985 Damdinsuren was frail and near the end of his life. Because of this, and coupled with the fact that Mongolia was showing signs of liberalization, Tuduv at last revealed his secret. The old historian was overjoyed and wanted to travel to Dornogobi to uncover the crates, but his age would not allow another desert expedition. Instead Damdinsuren sent his long-time student, D. Tsagaan. Together, Tuduv, Altangerel, Tsagaan and her husband went back to Sainshand and secretly uncovered some of the boxes. They inspected some items, but made no public mention of the artifacts.

In 1988, Tuduv decided the time had come to reveal something of his past. He was quoted in a newspaper article as saying that some of Danzan Rabjaa's relics could be found in the Gobi, and that his grandson would be responsible for them. The revelation shocked Altangerel, who worried that the news might get him into trouble with the authorities, but the matter passed without incident. Later that year, a group of artists met at a newspaper office in Sainshand and discussed how the legacy of Danzan Rabjaa could be restored. Altangerel attended the meeting and agreed to pursue his study of Danzan Rabjaa, but still said nothing of the hidden crates.

Tuduv died on December 9, 1990, the very same year that freedom of religion was restored in Mongolia. But his mission was complete; he had preserved the relics of Danzan Rabjaa.

Over the following months, Altangerel, Tsagaan and some of their friends from Sainshand exhumed half of the 64 original crates. More than 50 years after being buried in the sand, Rabjaa's belongings were again available for all to inspect and study. The materials from the crates were studied, analyzed and filed. Much of it was undertaken on an ad hoc basis, with various relics lying in heaps inside Altangerel's home.

G. Tsagaanderem, a colleague of Altangerel, explains the elation felt by those that helped to recover the crates. "We drove into the desert and Altangerel pointed to a place where we could find one of the boxes.

We dug into the ground, found the crate and took it to a winter stable. We opened it there and took out some garments and costumes. There were some statues, metal and brass objects. We cleaned the dust off and let the fresh air settle into the box. The artifacts were amazing; I had never seen anything like it. Even the museums didn't have such things. No one had seen objects like this since the 1930s."[7]

Some artifacts from Khamaryn Khiid ended up in other parts of the country. One was an important image of Padmasambhava, measuring about 16 inches tall. For years after the 1938 torching of Khamaryn Khiid this silver statue had been kept hidden by a former lama in Sainshand, until it was stolen from his home in 1970. Somehow the relic was sold again and ended up in the treasury of Mongol Bank in Ulaanbaatar. There it stayed until 2003 when the statue, valued at Tg24 million ($24,000), was returned to the museum in Sainshand. According to lore, its casting was the result of a death by stabbing at Khamaryn Khiid. After hearing the news of this death (supposedly of a Chinese man), Danzan Rabjaa created an order stating that all knives used as weapons be brought to him. The next day some 10,000 knives were piled upon his doorstep. Danzan Rabjaa then invited a silversmith from Doloon Nuur to melt the knives, and with the hot metal Danzan Rabjaa's students cast the image. They brought it to life through the reading of special prayers.

The 'Statue of 10,000 Knives', as it is now known, is now located at the Red Temple at Khamaryn Khiid. Most of the other artifacts collected so far are on display at the Danzanravjaa Museum. The museum, in a former bank building, is a fascinating treasure trove of Buddhist art, textbooks, theater costumes and personal items, such as Rabjaa's pen, sword and personal seal. Most of these items came out of the unearthed boxes. Featured prominently is a painting of Ulaan Sakhios (Sanskrit: Mahakala), the Red Talisman, who served as a prominent protector deity for Danzan Rabjaa and many other Mongolian monks. One display case shows items that were destroyed during the purge: mangled deities, burnt sutras and pointedly, a statue with what appears to be a bullet hole in its back. The center of the museum is dominated by a wax figure of Danzan Rabjaa, and in front of him sits the glass jar containing his remains. The museum is now a popular tourist attraction, but also serves as a shrine for the cult following which Danzan Rabjaa still enjoys in Dornogobi Aimag.

"When we started building the museum we thought there would be resistance by the government," Tsagaanderem explained. "People enjoyed his poetry but the government had never been open to recognizing his achievements because that would involve talking about Buddhism. But as the project continued we found the new government to be very supportive. People's minds changed in a very short time."[8]

Funds were also raised to build a new monastery at the site of the old Khamaryn Khiid. Altangerel wrote an article for a local newspaper and requested that the people of Dornogobi donate to the cause. The local army unit proved to be most generous, giving money and construction supplies. After a month of collecting, around a hundred volunteers went to the abandoned location and built two small temples. There is a modern day legend attached to this. It is said that in December 1990, a few months before construction was set to begin, and when nothing grows in the frozen wilderness, a beautiful lily sprouted out of the ground where Rabjaa's library had stood.

The area was declared a 'sacred zone' and hunting wild animals was prohibited. The crowning touch of the main temple was the dedication of a large statue of Padmasambhava. A small band of eight monks was employed to serve the rural temple. The head monk is Dösh, a former herder who had studied Buddhism in secret since 1960. Sh. Baatar, a Gesgui lama, is second in charge at Khamaryn Khiid. Baatar, a former worker at the Athletic Center in Sainshand, says he and the other monks have not only a close connection to Buddhism but also to Danzan Rabjaa.

"Danzan Rabjaa's spirit is most certainly here. I wanted to join this monastery to feel his spirit," said Baatar. "I once saw Danzan Rabjaa in a dream. He was exactly as I expected him to look. He was sitting on top of a cloud and said nothing, but only blessed me with his book."

Baatar echoes the words of the other monks at Khamaryn Khiid when he says he hopes the complex will someday expand to its former glory. "There were once 500 monks here, and I believe that someday there will be 500 monks again."[9]

The most outspoken of monks at Khamaryn Khiid is a former truck driver named B. Enkhjargal. He explains that the spirit of Danzan Rabjaa fuels his enthusiasm.

"I was drawn here by the gods and I am still waiting for my teacher to return. Our teacher is famous in Mongolia and all around the world. He has many abilities in religion, art and magic, he has the power to return water that came down from the mountains. We must learn from him and continue his work," Enkhjargal said.[10]

In 1993, a film crew spent the summer there shooting a documentary on Danzan Rabjaa. The film had far-reaching effects in reintroducing him to Mongolia. Tsagaan was also an integral part of the resurrection of Danzan Rabjaa; she spent the twilight years of her life bridging the gap between Damdinsuren's research and what the new discoveries had to offer. She died in 1998 at the age of 75.

"The people of Dornogobi will carry on Rabjaa's memory. We think he started our intellectual revolution. Now you can find many clever people in this province; we write well and we are talented. I think this is Rabjaa's influence," D. Bold theorized. "I think if Rabjaa were alive today our social situation would be better. Now there are many troubled people and illiterates. He could have influenced our spiritual life. Danzan Rabjaa's first plays were shown in 1827. Nearly 200 years have passed since then, and I think if his work was not interrupted by Communism and the current economic problems, Mongolia would be a center of intellectualism and spirituality."[11]

Altangerel spent much of the 1990s producing new material about Rabjaa based on the documents hidden by his grandfather. He is also training his young son Altan-Ochir (who also has an auspicious birthmark on his back) to take over his position when the latter reaches the age of twenty-five.

D. Bold gives the high accolades to Altangerel, "No one else in the world knows Danzan Rabjaa like Altangerel does," he says. "It is very important to listen to him and gather his stories. He is knowledgeable and clever and capable of carrying this important legacy."[12]

While Altangerel promotes various facets of Danzan Rabjaa's life, other researchers concentrate on specific areas such as Rabjaa's painting, poetry or philosophy. G. Tsagaanderem, who defended a master's degree on Rabjaa's paintings, explains that the Khutagt was not bound by classic rules of Buddhist artwork. He made his own rules.

"His work was very individualistic, so it's easy to determine what was painted by his hand and what was done by his students. Rabjaa lived at the same time as some of the great European revivalists like the Russian artists A.A. Ivanov and I.Y. Repin. They were advancing art in Europe just like Rabjaa was advancing art in Mongolia, even though they never knew each other. This shows that Mongolia had its own renaissance," Tsagaanderem explains.[13]

Some researchers, including Khurelbaatar, consider Rabjaa's skills as a healer, painter, architect and social critic as being over-exaggerated. "Danzan Rabjaa was a Buddhist. He was above talk about social conditions and the arts. His most publicized accomplishments were in some way used to advance his spiritual power. He realized that politics, feuding with Manchu authority and debate with other sects of Buddhism were on the path to suffering, so he swept all of that away," says Khurelbaatar.[14]

In the book *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai* (*History Loves Genius*), Khurelbaatar criticizes his peers for over-praising Rabjaa. He believes that Rabjaa's disciples and peers did not receive enough credit for their efforts in music and the arts. Credit for all their work, Khurelbaatar explains, was simply passed onto to Rabjaa. "Danzan Rabjaa wrote song lyrics, but it was Dadishura who composed most of the music. Many of his poems were actually created by his scribes, Khaliut and Jamynshagvar, who copied down Rabjaa's drunken tirades and turned them into comprehensible verse. As well, many of the paintings we attribute to Rabjaa were done by his students."[15]

The researcher suggests that the study of Rabjaa move away from what was taught during seventy years of Communism. "If you want to unlock the secrets of this man you cannot use a European or Russian key, you must use an Oriental key. The most important thing is not to separate his religion and philosophy," said Khurelbaatar.

"During Communism we were instructed to study Danzan Rabjaa from a historical and political point of view. We studied his song lyrics and tried to find meaning in them. But the words were just words; the real effect of the songs was the melody and energy of the singing. The sounds produced by the songs create an energy that affects the biorhythm of people and environment. For example, Danzan Rabjaa could sing songs to create rain and end drought, but it was the melody, not the words, which attracted the rain clouds," Khurelbaatar explains.

Why then did Rabjaa create a play like *Saran Khökhöö*, which showed conflicts between ranks and class relations?

"Imagine a plant. You cannot have a leaf without a stem. Therefore, you cannot explain Buddhism unless you have a method to explain it. So even though there are political elements to the story, these are only methods to explain Buddhism. Laganaa and Sersadanii were thought of as representing the cruel rule of the Manchus. It's not true. They were merely symbols of bad elements, bad karma and bad deities."

"Danzan Rabjaa can and should be studied from a philosophical and Buddhist point of view. Other methods are mere distractions."[16]

Debate about Danzan Rabjaa is heating up as more of his works are being published and clearer information about his mysterious life is disseminated. Researchers were able to present some of their findings at a conference to honor the 200-year anniversary of Rabjaa's birth, held in 2003. The event was a celebration of sorts, tribute to a man who in the face of persecution defended his nation, a man who respected women and the poor, and a Renaissance Man who developed Mongolian arts and culture. Two hundred years after his birth, Mongolia's Democratic Revolution provided researchers the opportunity to study these aspects of his life and clutch the missing links of his history.

The following poem, by the late writer and politician O. Dashbalbar, provides a lyrical view of Danzan Rabjaa for the modern era.

> He was a man of the world.
> Not just one river but all the oceans,
> Not just one piece of land but mountains, continents,
> Islands and steppes belong to him.
>
> He loved not just one group of people,
> But all creatures under heaven.
> His love did not know the limit of the eight directions.
> The galaxies of wandering stars weren't enough for his love.
>
> He lived at the same time as Pushkin.
> Each of them had their own body and
> The distance between them was great.
> But they breathed the same air and had the same desire:
> freedom.
>
> He didn't meet Pushkin and never heard his name.
> Pushkin also did not meet the great poet Rabjaa,
> Although in different parts of the world, they saw
> The sun and moon with the same eyes.
>
> Animals and the Gobi Desert were close to him.
> Love and books were close to him.
> He loved people and freedom.
> The Gobi Lord came through these doors.

The river of beautiful women and
Images of the gods were his friends.
He could escape the badness of the world,
Leave the wheel of life and be free.

Now he lives in the peace of eternity, and
Closed the door to the lower world
When he was alive he didn't support bad leadership.
Rabjaa is the power to escape living.

He understood that the world deceives,
So he made vodka, women and intellectuals his friends.
His consciousness was against violence,
And he even challenged the Bogd Gegeen.

Because of freedom he could even oppose his Buddha.
Rabjaa was eager to become Buddha.
He preferred physical and spiritual freedom,
Great lyricist Rabjaa.

◆

Epilogue

One major question remains regarding this investigation of Danzan Rabjaa. What became of the remaining boxes buried by Tuduv? At least three boxes (perhaps as many as five) were found and destroyed in 1969. Altangerel uncovered 32 in 1990. Several more were dug up between 2001 and 2004. Around fifteen chests remain buried in the earth, preserved and protected by the Gobi. Altangerel, the only person who knows the location of the remaining boxes, says they will stay put until the museum is properly financed and equipped to deal with such an important undertaking.

Since the late 1990s, Mongolia has suffered the loss of priceless artifacts and treasure from its poorly guarded museums and monasteries. Quality alarm systems and protective showcases are almost non-existent, creating a worry that Danzan Rabjaa's treasure will be plundered unless properly protected. The museum curator Bold explained his great trepidation about the fate of the museum when he said that financing it was well beyond his means. He hopes that a team of archaeologists and researchers will one day be able to uncover and study the contents of the crates.

The Mongolian government offers little support to operate the museum and Bold admits that it is an easy target for robbery unless some investment in security is made. Khamaryn Khiid's weakness was displayed in 1998 when its main Buddha statue was stolen from the temple altar. Police eventually tracked down the statue and the alleged thieves. Altangerel regrets that he cannot provide a more secure museum or storage facility. If tourist numbers increase, he says, the revenue earned from this trade will be put into building a new museum. There were positive indicators in 2002, when the crown prince of Japan spent two of his ten days in Mongolia at Altangerel's tour camp. The Japanese, who have been keenly interested in buying up Altangerel's collection of temple goods, may be a promising outlet for development and investment in the monastery.

Altangerel continues to declare that he will not divide the collections and says his ultimate goal is to house the remainder of the collection inside a reconstruction of Rabjaa's 'White Temple' at Khamaryn Khiid. Altangerel considers it his duty as takhilch to keep the collection under one roof as his ancestors did, and believes that Mongolia's new democracy will help him achieve this.

For the time being, followers of Danzan Rabjaa will have to remain content with the artifacts to which they have access. It could be quite some time before the entire collection is finally revealed. Gold statues, silk costumes and Rabjaa's eloquent words penned onto thin paper are not quite lost, yet they are silenced by Mongolia's struggle to regain its consciousness.

"When the time is right," says Altangerel, the crates will be drawn from the earth, properly researched, and displayed again for the benefit of the Gobi people.

Endnotes

Chapter One

1. Huc, p. 48.
2. This verse is from a poem called "A Mirror of Wisdom," found on page 240 of *An Anthology of Danzan Rabjaa's Poetry*, compiled (in Mongolian) by D. Tsagaan and published in Mongolia in 1992 with the title *A Mirror of Wisdom*. The translation, unpublished, is by Batbold Baast.
3. Some scholars contend that when referring to certain personalities such as Rabjaa, the term "Dogshin" is better defined as "Genius."
4. Pozdneyev, p. 333.
5. There is one photograph of a teen-age boy that is said to be Rabjaa, and is often included in books about him. However, the picture is almost certainly not Rabjaa as his teen-age years were several decades before the first cameras arrived in Mongolia.
6. Modern day Khövsgöl sum, Dornogobi Aimag.
7. *Van* is term that means lord. In this sentence, the Gobi Mergen Van is the head of Gobi Mergen Van khoshuu.
8. Another version says a lama named Tserenbaazar ignited the fire.
9. Pozdneyev, p. 361.
10. *Ulemchin Chanar* newspaper, p. 13.

Chapter Two

1. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 91. Note that this poem is also found in Danzan Rabjaa's collected works, which calls into question its true author. While Gobi legend attributes the piece to Jamyn Oidov Jampts, scholars would argue that the poem belonged to Rabjaa.
2. Roerich, *Trails to Inmost Asia*, p. 185.
3. Some historians have written that Rabjaa's mother died in childhood. A new school of thought suggests that she raised him by herself, a matter discussed in chapter 3.
4. *Khutagtiin Tukhai Khuuch*, p. 11.
5. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 85.
6. Heissig, *History of Mongolian Literature*, p. 189.
7. Pozdneyev, *Religion and Ritual in Society*, p. 344.

Chapter Three

1. Kirapolska "Who was Dulduitu", p. 102-3.
2. Heissig, *History of Mongolian Literature*, p. 190.
3. *Khutagiin Tukhai Huuch,* p. 13.

4. Pozdneyev, p. 345-46.
5. Damdinsuren, *Mongoliin Uran... Asuudalud*, p. 81.
6. Baatar, p. 35.
7. Huc, p. 32.
8. Croner, Webpage, "China /Inner Mongolia/ Doloon Nuur".
9. Pozdneyev, *Mongolia and the Mongols, vol. 2*, p. 193.
10. Taken from local literature on Doloon Nuur city.
11. Pozdneyev, p. 350.
12. Damdinsuren, *Mongoliin Uran... Asuudalud*, p. 84.
13. *Mongol Nutag Dakh Tukh Soel Dursgal*, p. 266-7.
14. Danzan Rabjaa, *Zokioliin Emekhtgel*, p. 120.

Chapter Four

1. Interview, June 2001.
2. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 61.
3. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 65.
4. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 27.
5. Huc, p. 33-34.

Chapter Five

1. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 173.
2. Howarth, p. 72.
3. Huc, p. 139-140.
4. The translation of this poem varies as more than one version of the poem has been found in the original Mongol. Also note that the work itself is not completely original. Some verses were originally composed by the Third Mergen Gegeen (1717-1766).

Chapter Six

1. Bawden, *The Modern History of Mongolia*, p. 386.
2. Przewalski, p. 69.
3. Bawden, "Remarks on Some Contemporary Performances," p. 39.
4. Gilmour, p. 268-269.
5. Krueger, p. 80.
6. Damdinsuren, *Mongoliin Uran Zokhioliin Ov Ulamjaliin Asuudalud*, p. 94-95. In this play, Palgye Dorje was actually named Lhaladbaldorj.
7. Interview, June 2001.
8. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 264.
9. Heissig, *A Lost Civilization: The Mongols Rediscovered*, p. 218.
10. Damdinsuren, *Mongoliin Uran Zokhioliin Ov Ulamjaliin Asuudalud*, p. 96.
11. Dogmid, *The Mongol Messenger*.

12. Damdinsuren, *Mongoliin Uran Zokhioliin Ov Ulamjaliin Asuudalud*, p. 94-95.
13. Heissig, *A Lost Civilization, The Mongols Rediscovered*, p. 214.
14. Heissig, *History of Mongolian Literature*, vol. 1, p. 216.
15. Named Sain Altan in the 1770 translation.
16. Named Ekshig in the 1770 translation.
17. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 24.
18. In the 1770 version, the cuckoo does not die but remains faithful to the birds by staying among them to preach Buddhism.
19. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 22.
20. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, pp. 24-25.
21. *Zokioliin Emekhtgel*, p. 339.
22. Damdinsuren, *Mongoliin Uran Zokhioliin Ov Ulamjaliin Asuudalud*, p. 95.
23. *Yaralt* newspaper, 1993.

Chapter Seven

1. *Yaralt*, 1993, p. 3.
2. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 100.
3. Heissig, *History of Mongolian Literature*, p. 203.
4. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 59.
5. Meaning, her perfect body, owned by the writer.
6. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 41.
7. Lhavgasuren, p. 95.
8. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 100.
9. "Humanism in Some Works Known as Surgaals" (a report).
10. Danzan Rabjaa, *Zokioliin Emkhtgel*, p. 279.
11. Bawden, p. 170.
12. Bawden, p. 171.
13. See, for example, the *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 67-68.
14. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 43.
15. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 43.
16. Ones with fine voices are probably birds.
17. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 262.
18. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 92.

Chapter Eight

1. Baatar, *Yaralt* newspaper, 1998.
2. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 105.
3. *Khutagtiin Tukhai Khuuch*, p. 25.
4. Interview, September 2000.
5. Interview, February 2000.
6. *Khutagtiin Tukhai Khuuch*, pp. 36-37.

7. Interview with Lovon Lam Dösh, February 2000.
8. Interview with Baast Batbold, May 2003.
9. Interview with Baast Batbold, May 2003.
10. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 60.
11. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 49.
12. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 45.
13. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 68.

Chapter Nine

1. Chi-Tien lived in Hangzhou at the time of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). He was considered an incarnate Bodhisattva who flouted Buddhist doctrine by eating meat and leading an unrestrained life, but was known for aiding the poor and downtrodden. He is best known as the hero of Jigong Zhuan (Biography of Master Jidian), written during the late Qing Dynasty.
2. Heissig, *History of Mongolian Literature*, vol. 1, p. 186.
3. Interview with D. Bold, June 2001.
4. Interview with D. Bold, June 2001.
5. Interview with Baast Batbold, May 2003.
6. Heissig, *History of Mongolian Literature*, vol. 1, p. 220.
7. Huc, p. 372.
8. *Khutagtiin Tukhai Khuuch*, p. 28-29.
9. Interview with D. Bold, June 2001.
10. *Khutagtiin Tukhai Khuuch*, p. 33.
11. *Khutagtiin Tukhai Khuuch*, p. 26-27.
12. Interview with Lovon Lam Dösh, February 2000.
13. Interview with D. Bold, June 2001.
14. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 100.
15. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 49.
16. Underdown, p. 111.
17. Information from *Khutagtiin Tukhai Khuuch*, p. 14-15, and interview with Altangerel, February 2000.
18. Information from *Khutagtiin Tukhai Khuuch*, p. 40, and interview with Altangerel, June 2001.
19. About eight kilometers west of Zuunbayan.
20. *Khutagtiin Tukhai Khuuch*, p. 23-24.

Chapter Ten

1. Gilmour, p. 140.
2. Przewalski, p. 14.
3. Heissig, *History of Mongolian Literature*, p. 198-99.
4. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 46.

5. The date, 1853, might be a mistake. Forty years would be 1861, five years after his death.
6. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 202.

Chapter Eleven

1. Heissig, *History of Mongolian Literature*, vol. 1, p. 210.
2. Tsagaan, *Rabjaagiin Yaruu Nairgiin Zokhioliin Toim*, introduction.
3. Danzan Rabjaa, *Yaruu Nairgiin Tsomorlog*, p. 171.
4. *Khutagiin Tukhai Khuuch*, p. 46.
5. Document from Danzanravjaa Museum, Sainshand.
6. Interview with Altangerel, June 2001.
7. Precise numbers of the dead and jailed remain unknown.

Chapter Twelve

1. *Ulemchin Chanar newspaper*, May 2003.
2. Interview, June 2001.
3. Interview, March 2000.
4. *Yaralt*, 1998.
5. Interview, June 2001.
6. Some descriptions of Tuduv and Altangerel from Peter Morrow's article "Preserving the Legacy of Danzan Rabjaa, Lord of the Gobi."
7. Interview, June 2001.
8. Interview, June 2001.
9. Interview, June 2001.
10. Interview, June 2001.
11. Interview, June 2001.
12. Interview, June 2001.
13. Interview, June 2001.
14. Interview, October 2000.
15. *Sutandaa Tukh Khairtai*, p. 77.
16. Interview, October 2000.

Chronology

1750s Qing Dynasty gains control over the whole Mongol territory.
1793 New Manchu law allows khutagts to be born in common families.
1800 Fourth Noyon Khutagt executed.
1803 Danzan Rabjaa is born into a common family.
1809 Danzan Rabjaa is recognized as the rebirth of the Fourth Noyon Khutagt but, to safeguard his life, is also given the title of Avshaa Gegeen.
1812 Danzan Rabjaa meets the Bogd Gegeen, who names him 'Luvson Danzan Rabjaa.'
1817 Danzan Rabjaa studies in Alasha.
1820 Fifth Bogd Gegeen enthroned.
1820 Danzan Rabjaa commissions Khamaryn Khiid.
1821 Danzan Rabjaa's only surviving parent dies.
1822 Danzan Rabjaa commissions the Labrang sьm in the Ordos region.
1825 Danzan Rabjaa visits Doloon Nuur with 100 disciples.
1825 Danzan Rabjaa writes the 'The Kite.'
1826 Danzan Rabjaa lives in Peking
1827-28 Danzan Rabjaa adapts the libretto *Saran Khųkhųų Namtar* for a Mongolian audience.
1828 Danzan Rabjaa travels to Doloon Nuur and Chahar region of China. Later this year he starts the construction of Gurvan Galbiin Khiid.
1829 Danzan Rabjaa visits Chahar to study *tsam* and painting.
1830 Danzan Rabjaa visits his temples in Outer Mongolia.
1831 Danzan Rabjaa studies theater in Alasha and makes a brief trip to Amdo.
1832 Danzan Rabjaa briefly visits Khuree.
1834 Danzan Rabjaa winters in Peking. Construction of the Khamaryn Khiid theater is complete.
1836 Danzan Rabjaa travels in southern Gobi Mergen Van and Chahar.
1839 Danzan Rabjaa cures the Fifth Bogd Gegeen of an ailment.
1841 Fifth Bogd Gegeen holds an audience with the Manchu Emperor.
1841 Danzan Rabjaa attempts to reach Lhasa, but is called back by the Janjiya Khutagt of Doloon Nuur.
1842 Danzan Rabjaa builds the Givaadinravjaaling Treasury (the White Temple).
1842-1844 French missionary Abbй Huc travels in Manchu China.
1843 Danzan Rabjaa visits Gurvan Galbiin Khiid.
1846 Danzan Rabjaa visits the hot spring area near modern day Arvaikheer. In this same year he also visited Doloon Nuur and Guvan Galbiin Khiid.
1850 Danzan Rabjaa visits Gurvan Galbiin Khiid and Alasha.
1852 Danzan Rabjaa performs a religious ceremony to end the Taiping Rebellion.
1853 Danzan Rabjaa gathers his disciples at 'Shambala' and predicts his death.
1854 Danzan Rabjaa commissions the Ordu Khuree in Ulaanshand. He later travels to Ongiin Gol and then Khuree.

1855 Sixth Noyon Khutagt born.
1856 Danzan Rabjaa dies.
1873 Eighth Bogd Gegeen enthroned.
1875 Sixth Noyon Khutagt dies.
1891 Seventh Noyon Khutagt is born.
1911 Qing Dynasty falls and Mongolia gains nominal independence.
1931 Seventh Noyon Khutagt is arrested for 'counter-revolutionary' activities.
1938 Khamaryn Khiid is destroyed by the order of Mongolia's Communist government.
1950s History professor Damdinsuren revives Danzan Rabjaa studies.
1990 Curator Tuduv dies.
1991 Khamaryn Khiid is re-opened with one temple.
2003 Celebrations held for the 200th anniversary of Danzan Rabjaa's birth.

Gobi Noyon Khutagts and Life Dates

1. Agvangonchig (1621-1703)
2. Jamyn Dambi Jantzen (1704-1739)
3. Jamyn Danzan (1740-1765)
4. Jamyn Oidov Jampts (1765-1800)
5. Luvson Danzan Rabjaa (1803-1856)
6. Luvson Dambi Jantzen Odser (1855-1875)
7. Agvan Luvson Dambi Jantzen (1891-1931)
8. Samdan Jampts (1933-1945)

Danzan Rabjaa Takhilch and Life Dates

1. Balchinchoijoo 1804-1865 (61 years)
2. Gan-Ochir 1837-1889 (52 years)
3. Naria 1861-1900 (39 years)
4. Ongoi 1890-1931 (41 years)
5. Tuduv 1912-1990 (78 years)
6. Altangerel b.1960-

Bogd Gegeens of Urga and Life Dates

1. Zanabazar (1653-1723)
2. Losang Tenbey Dronmey (1724-1757)
3. Yeshe Tenbey Nyima (1758-1773)
4. Losang Tupten Wongchuk (1775-1813)
5. Losang Tsultrim Jikmey Tenpai Gyaltsen (1815-1842)
6. Losang Palden Tenpa (1842-1849)
7. Ngawang Chokyi Wongchuk Trinley Gyatsho (1850-1868)
8. Ngawang Losang Chokyi Nyima Tenzin Wongchuk (1870-1924)

Dalai Lamas and Life Dates

1. Gyalwa Gendun Drubpa (1391-1475)
2. Gyalwa Gedun Gyatsho (1475-1542)
3. Gyalwa Sonam Gyatsho 1543-1588)
4. Gyalwa Yonten Gyatsho (1589-1617)
5. Gyalwa Ngawang Losang Gyatsho (1617-1682)
6. Gyalwa Tsangyang Gyatsho (1683-1746) deposed 1706
7. Gyalwa Kelzang Gyatsho 1708-1757
8. Gyalwa Jampel Gyatsho (1758-1804)
9. Gyalwa Lungtok Gyatsho (1806-1815)
10. Gyalwa Tsultrim Gyatsho (1816-1837)
11. Gyalwa Khendrup Gyatsho (1838-1856)
12. Gyalwa Trinley Gyatsho (1856-1875)
13. Gyalwa Thubten Gyatsho (1876-1933)
14. Gyalwa Tenzing Gyatsho (born 1935)

Panchen Lamas and Life Dates

A Panchen Pre-Incarnation, Khendrub Je (1385-1438)
A Panchen Pre-Incarnation, Sonam Choklang (1438-1505)
A Panchen Pre-Incarnation, Losang Dondrup (1505-1568)
The First Panchen Lama, Losang Chokyi Gyaltsen (1569-1662)
The Second Panchen Lama, Losang Yeshe (1663-1737)
The Third Panchen Lama, Losang Palden Yeshe (1737-1780)
The Fourth Panchen Lama, Tenpai Nyima 1781-1852)
The Fifth Panchen Lama, Palden Chokyi Drakpa (1853-1882)
The Sixth Panchen Lama, Gelek Namgyal (1883-1937)
The Seventh Panchen Lama, Losang Chokyi Gyaltsen (1938-1989)

Qing Emporers and Reign Dates

Shunzhi (1644-61)
Kangxi (1662-1722)
Yongzheng (1723-35)
Qianlong (1736-95)
Jiaqing (1796-1820)
Daoguang (1821-50)
Xianfong (1851-61)
Tungzhi (1862-74)
Kuangxu (1875-1908)
Xuantung (1909-11)

Glossary

General Terms

Ace lhamo: Buddhist ethics play.

Abbé Huc: French missionary who traveled in Inner Mongolia, 1842-1844.

Agvongonchig: the First Noyon Khutagt.

Albutu: Ordinary person; nomad.

Airag: Fermented mare's milk.

Alasha: An area of western Inner Mongolia, frequently visited by Danzan Rabjaa.

Amgalan Monastery: Temple complex commissioned by the First Noyon Khutagt.

Arats: Impoverished herders and peasants.

Arkhi: Alcohol. Usually distilled from cows' milk.

Badarchin: Wanderer.

Blue Faith: Cult created by Van Tuden, an early 20th century Mongol aristocrat. Elements of hedonism and the drinking of blood were involved.

Bogd Gegeen: The head of the Buddhism in Mongolia.

Bön: Animist religion in Tibet before Buddhism.

Buduun: Fat, overweight.

Choilong Monastery: Temple complex in Dornogobi Aimag, commissioned by the Second Noyon Khutagt.

Dogshin: Literally: terrible. When making reference to Danzan Rabjaa it can mean "fierce," or, as some scholars allege, "genius."

Doloon Nuur: City in Inner Mongolia, home to the Janjiya Khutagt.

Dornogobi: A province in southeast Mongolia, where Khamaryn Khiid is located.

Ger: Felt tent used by nomads.

Gelugpa: The Yellow School of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Tsongkhapa in the 14th century. The Dalai Lama leads this sect, which is also known as the 'Yellow Hat School.'

Gurvan Galbiin Khiid: Monastery complex built by Danzan Rabjaa in south Gobi.

Khamaryn Khiid: Monastery built by Danzan Rabjaa in 1821.

Khashant Khiid: Gobi Monastery that was home to the Fourth Noyon Khutagt.

Khiid: Monastery.

Khuree: Old name of Mongolia's capital Ulaanbaatar.

Khuvilgan: Incarnation of a senior lama.

Jamyn Danzan: Third Noyon Khutagt was executed at the age of 25.

Janjiya Khutagt: Head Lama of Doloon Nuur.

Khalkh: The largest Mongol ethnic group, and the area of modern day, central Mongolia.

Lang: A weight measurement equaling 37.2 grams.

Naadam: sports festival (archery, horse racing, wrestling).

Noyon Khutagt: Lord Saint, of which Rabjaa was the fifth incarnation.

Li-Fan-Yuan: Chinese Ministry of Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs.

Manchus: Nomadic tribesmen from areas lying east of Mongolia and north of Peking. Founders of China's Qing Dynasty.

Ongiin Gol Khiid: Monastery that hosted Danzan Rabjaa's ordination in 1809. Located in Dundgov Aimag.

Qing: Name of the Manchu Dynasty that ruled China from 1644-1911.

Saran Khökhöö: Moon Cuckoo.

Shav: Peasants under a khuvilgan.

Shulmuss: Female devil.

Stupa: A white monument with a square base and a top with overlying cylindrical shapes, symbolizing the mind of the Buddha.

Surgaal: Precepts or instructions given by a teacher to his students.

Süm: Temple.

Tantra: A method of Buddhist meditation which allows the possibility of immediate realization.

Tsam: A religious dance performed by monks.

Yansang Yidam: The Buddhist deity associated with the Gobi Noyon Khutagt incarnates.

Administrative and Geo-Political Terms

Aimags: Provinces.

Khoshuu: Banners (county).

Sum: Military divisions of 150 men. The number of sum in a khoshuu was between one and ten.

Otog: Units where shav live.

Names of Aristocratic Classes

Khaan: Ruled one of the seven Khalkh khoshuu

Chin Van: Held sixty bondmen

Jung Van: Held fifty bondmen

Beil: Held forty bondmen

Beis: Held thirty-five bondmen

Gun: Held thirty bondmen

Zasag-taij: Eldest son of a nobleman

Names of Buddhist Classes

Gegeen: Khuvilgan who has displayed extraordinary efforts of civil merit.

Lama: A Buddhist teacher or spiritual master.

Khutagt: A reincarnated saint with special recognition from the Manchu court in Peking.

Tamagtai khutagt: A khutagt with a special seal indicating that he owns a particular estate.

Tamagui khutagt: A khutagt without a seal and small numbers of shav. They are subordinate to the local administration. Usually known simply as khuvilgan.

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Danzan Rabjaa's personal seal

DANZAN RABJAA (1803-1856), officially known as the Fifth Noyon Incarnate Lama of the Gobi Desert, is perhaps Mongolia's most beloved saint. The Fourth had made so many scandals that the Manchu Emperor banned his reincarnation. Consequently when the young child was enthroned as the Fifth, the Emperor issued an edict of execution on the boy and all associated with the event. The child was only saved by the personal intervention of the Fourth Panchen Lama (Panchen Tenpai Nyima; 1781-1852) and a letter of appeal from the young Ninth Dalai Lama, Luntok Gyatso (1806-1815). Their efforts proved well worthwhile, for the boy went on to become one of the greatest mystics and creative geniuses of 19th century Mongolia.

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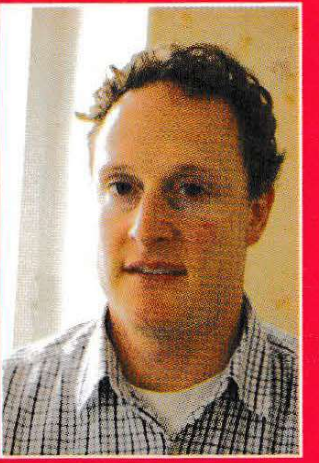

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Cover illustration based on a 19th century painting of Danzaa Rabjaa kept in the Danzanravjaa Museum, Sainshand

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